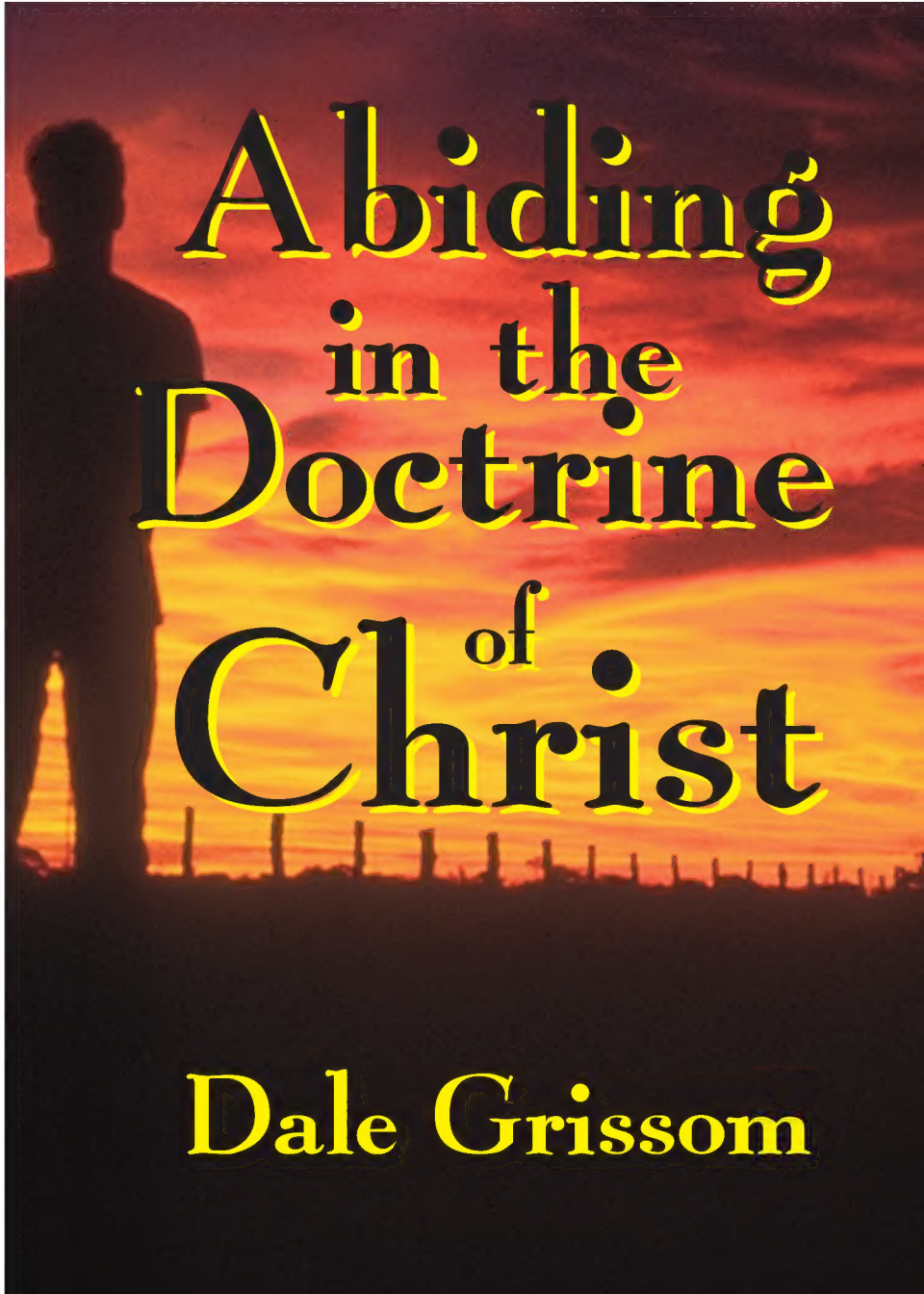


The background of the cover is a sunset or sunrise scene. On the left, there is a dark silhouette of a person standing and looking towards the right. The sky is filled with warm, glowing colors of orange, yellow, and red. In the distance, a silhouette of a fence line with vertical posts is visible against the horizon.

Abiding in the Doctrine of Christ

Dale Grissom

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by

Dale Grissom

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Dedication

A special thanks to my daughter, Patricia Adams, for the encouragement she gave me, and to Donna Mahan, Linda Earnest, and Karen Jones, who served as my secretaries and did much typing and proofreading. Their efforts made this book possible.

Introduction

In the wake of World War II a new generation arose; disrespectful of parents, disrespectful of government, disrespectful of God. So-called liberal ideals have been instrumental in the disintegration of families. Divorce rates soar, single-parent families are the norm, juvenile crime is at an all-time high. Self is given first place; others come a poor second. The legalization of abortion is a direct result of such a philosophy. Even in congregations of the Lord's church, such things are not unknown.

Voices are being raised in congregations throughout the world for changes in the name of progress. Proponents of change insist that the church must be modernized to meet the needs of its members. Members, in increasing numbers, attend services to be entertained or spiritually uplifted, rather than for the purpose of worshiping god. Voices of reason are needed as a reminder that God's truth is universal and eternal.

The following articles were written to teach and admonish the brethren of the Lord's church in Dexter, Missouri. They were written on a weekly basis and originally published in *The Reminder*, the bulletin of the church of Christ at Dexter. The truths written therein are timely for all christians everywhere because they come from God's Word, **The Holy Bible**. It is with humility and with a deep and abiding love for the Gospel of Christ that they are assembled here, and with a prayerful trust that God's Word will always prevail above the foolish philosophies of mankind. His Word is the answer for every generation.

A Statement from the Publisher

We are always on the lookout for good scriptural articles to put together in book form for our work here at home, India, and other parts of the world. Here in the states the World Bible School teachers send many of our books to Africa and Asia once their students have completed their Bible Correspondence courses. This is somewhat a followup effort to be sure that they understand the Lord's will for them, and to encourage them to obey the gospel.

A few years ago my wife and I met brother Dale Grissom in Dexter, MO while visiting with the local church of Christ. We also began to receive the weekly bulletin of that congregation and notices that brother Grissom had a brief article in almost every issue. Having been a former elder, and later a full-time personal worker — and a very fruitful one — his articles seemed to be ideal for the type of printing and literature distribution work that we do. We approached brother Grissom about this, and he gladly submitted a collection of his articles. Now we offer them to you with the prayer that you will find them helpful in your work. We would also encourage you to share them with your friends and the people in your area.

Thank you, Dale, for making these articles available for publication. We pray that they will be used literally throughout the world to the glory of God.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS
July 12, 1999

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Christ

Dale Grissom

Live Faithfully

There continues to be a problem of unfaithfulness among members of the Lord's church. Each year many in the brotherhood grow weak in faith and slip back into the world. Satan is so powerful; he is able to tempt Christians in just the right areas, and he succeeds in drawing many back into a life of sin.

If we will only go to our Bibles we will find the encouragement we need to resist Satan and his temptations. We read one such passage in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."*

Brethren, we must be aware that temptation is out there and that it is real. The Lord will help us overcome temptation if we will obey Him and abide in His Word. And, by so doing, we will also grow and mature in Christ. We will become stronger and stronger in our faith and we will produce the kind of fruit that is pleasing to our Lord. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:4-11: *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and*

hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We are admonished again in 1 Corinthians 10:12: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Our journey on this earth is short. Let’s be faithful to our Lord so that heaven will be our home for eternity.

The Judgment

Many in the world today believe that when a person dies he ceases to exist. They believe neither in the judgment nor in the hereafter. Paul, in writing the Hebrew letter, said, *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27).

Jesus spoke of the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, where He vividly describes the eternal abode of the righteous and the wicked. This is perhaps the clearest picture of the judgment in the Bible. As Christians, we must be so convinced of the judgment that we will not only do our best to live righteous lives, but also teach others that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:10: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* Judgment day will be frightening for all who are not prepared to meet the Lord. Nothing will be hidden on that day, for all is known to the Lord. All will stand before the right-

eous judge to receive their just reward.

The word of God tells us in Acts 17:31: *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* We who are God’s children have a wonderful hope — a hope for eternal life. We must be constantly awake and alert so we will be ready for that great day when the Lord will gather all men to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Must One Be a Member of the Church?

The book of Acts records the history of the New Testament church, and we read of its beginning in the second chapter: *“Praising God, and having favor with all people, And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47). We notice in this reference that those who were saved did not join a church as many in the religious world today believe they must do, but were added to the church by the Lord.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:16: *“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby...”* And in Colossians 1:18: *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”* The Lord wants all to come together into the one church. We cannot join the church, but when we obey the gospel of Christ, God adds us to it.

Paul, through the Holy Spirit, writes again in Ephesians 1:22,23: *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.”* Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all religious people would obey the gospel plan of salvation and be united in the one church of which Christ is the head! So many look for a church because someone in their family belongs to a particular religious group, or because that group agrees with their preconceived ideas. We must be willing to go to the Bible and study to learn what is God’s will. Then we must be willing to change our lives to conform to that will. The Bible is the word of God and we must accept it. If we love Christ we will keep His commandments.

Can a Child of God Fall From Grace?

There are many in the religious world who believe and teach that once a person is saved, there is nothing he can do that will cause him to be lost. Consider, however, the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:4: *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”* Here Paul told the church in Galatia that if they tried to live under the law of Moses, they would fall from grace. The Old Law had been fulfilled and had been taken out of the way, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

Many today fail to rightly divide the word of God, continuing to try to live under part of the Old Law — especially if it can be

used to their advantage to justify something they want to practice in religion. We must realize that the Old Law is good to study and that it will help us to understand the New Testament, but the Old Law is no longer in effect. We must live under the Law of Christ, the New Testament.

Those who believe they cannot fall from grace are deceiving themselves, and this is a dangerous way to live. We must spend each day living according to the word of God, always praying to God and seeking His forgiveness. The following scriptures bear this out: *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12); and *“...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). Even Paul was concerned about falling from grace: *“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”* (1 Corinthians 9:27). We must always be alert so that sin will not slip in and take over in our lives.

In 2 Peter 2:21,22 we see that we can fall from grace after we have known the way of righteousness: *“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”* Those who truly study the word of God with understanding cannot help but realize that it is possible to fall from grace, and that those who do not repent of sin in their lives will be lost.

Should Preachers Be Called Reverend and Father?

The Bible is very clear about who should be called Reverend and who should be called Father. We find the term reverend in Psalms 111:9: *“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.”* We clearly see from this scripture that God is holy and reverend. God is to be worshiped and adored. No man is holy to the point that he is equal to God. Jesus is equal with God, as we read in Philippians 2:6: *“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”* It is very dangerous for a man to make himself equivalent to God. No man deserves to be worshiped; only God should be honored in this way.

No man on earth should be called Father in a spiritual sense. We read what the Bible says about this in Matthew 23:8,9: *“But be not ye called Rabbi for one is your Master even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your father, which is in heaven.”* This could not be plainer. The scriptures clearly state, *“...call no man your father on earth.”* It is also very dangerous to wear the title Father.

It is so sad when men try to elevate themselves by wearing names that are meant only for God. Even the apostle Peter would not let man bow down to him. We read about this incident in Acts 10:25,26: *“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.”* The apostle Paul cautioned that a man should not think too highly of himself in Romans 12:3: *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to*

every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

God's Family

We are part of God's family. We have been born again by obedience to the gospel plan of salvation. We are set apart by the new birth that takes place when we contact the blood of Christ in baptism. We are born again, *"...not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever"* (1 Peter 1:23).

The love that exists between God's children knows no end; it remains strong through the years. There are times, especially when something sad happens to one of our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we grieve and cry together. There are other times when we rejoice together because a brother or sister has prospered, either in health or in material blessings. In adversity or prosperity, it is wonderful to have a family with whom we can share — a family who has a home in heaven as its common goal. This bond makes the relationship of God's family a very special one.

One way we show love for our family is through service. Last Sunday our high school group honored the senior members of our congregation. These young people (with the help of some ladies in the congregation) planned and prepared a delicious meal and fellowship. This church is blessed with many fine young people who are willing to show their love for their brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of age — an indication they have

been set apart from the world and have their minds on spiritual things.

As God's family, we have the wonderful promise of spending eternity together if we will remain faithful. The apostle Paul spoke of this assurance in 2 Timothy 4:7,8: *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* Let us, like Paul, fight the fight, finish the course, and keep the faith as we look forward to the heavenly reward God has promised to those who obey Him and remain faithful (Revelation 2:10).

Repentance

Repentance plays a very important role in the plan of salvation. Before we can put the Lord on in baptism, we must first repent (Acts 2:38). A Christian who sins against God must repent in order to re-establish that relationship. The importance of repentance is stressed in Acts 17:30: *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."*

Repentance is spoken of in many scriptures — sometimes with reference to those who desire to become Christians, and sometimes in connection with those who are Christians but have sinned. In the eighth chapter of Acts we read of Philip going down to Samaria and preaching the gospel of Christ. There were many that responded to his preaching, including Simon, who

used sorcery to bewitch the people. Upon their arrival in Samaria, Peter and John began to lay hands on those who had obeyed the gospel so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw what they were doing, he offered them money in an attempt to buy their power. Peter's response is recorded in verses 20-24: *"...Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."*

Christians who sin privately need to repent privately, but when their sins become known and are public, they need to repent publicly. The church must be free of unresolved sins of a public nature — sins that bring reproach upon the body of Christ. In 2 Peter 2:20-22, we see how sin can ruin one's life. Here the apostle Peter, through inspiration, gives a vivid description of how terrible sin is for those who do not seek forgiveness: *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."*

How to Grow Spiritually

It is important that children of God grow spiritually. In order to do so, we must begin with scriptures that are easy to understand. Peter refers to these passages as the milk of the word: *"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby"* (1 Peter 2:1,2). Knowledge of the basics of God's word is essential. This basic knowledge is an important building block as we acquire the wisdom necessary to understand the more difficult passages in the Bible. We should not involve ourselves with the more difficult and controversial issues without first building a firm foundation of faith and understanding.

With regard to our spiritual growth, let us consider the apostle Peter's admonition: *"And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."* (2 Peter 1:5-11), and Paul's encouragement to the Corinthian brethren: *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding*

in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

As Christians, we *must* grow spiritually in order to be pleasing to God. This growth can be accomplished by being students of the word and by worshiping God in the ways He has commanded us. We need to follow the example of the early Christians as recorded by Luke in Acts 2:42: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.”*

By What Shall We Be Judged?

In John 12:48 we read that everyone will be judged by the word of God: *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”* Sadly, there are many in the world that will stand in the judgment unprepared. That will be a terrible day for them. Therefore, they try not to think about the judgment because they know they are not living for Christ.

We read about the judgment day again in Revelation 20:12: *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”* This passage teaches that there is something Christians must be doing that we will be judged according to our works. There is going to be a judgment day and no one will be able to escape it. But God, in His infinite love and mercy, has blessed us with time to get our lives ready for that day. Only those who obey the gospel plan of salvation and live faithfully unto death will be prepared

(Revelation 2:10).

We would do well today to follow the example of the apostle Paul. He was very busy preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ. We, too, need to stay busy in the kingdom (church), working to expand its borders by teaching and converting sinners to Christ.

Paul writes of the reward that the Lord will give to the righteous in 2 Timothy 4:7,8: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”* We read again of the judgment in Hebrews 9:27: *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”* Each and every one of us will face that righteous judge. Therefore all of us, regardless of who we are, must prepare for that day (Matthew 25:31ff).

Bible Study

Bible study is a vital part of a Christian's life, and knowing how to study is essential if we are to gain knowledge of the word. Paul, in writing to Timothy, exhorted him: *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Brethren, we are a people starving for knowledge of the Bible. We have come to rely on the media to provide us with information and details of news events and activities, and have lost the discipline needed for study. Our desire for secular education is great, yet desire for Bible knowledge is at an all time

low. Many hours of reading, meditation, and prayer must be spent in order to learn the great truths contained in God's word.

Sadly, there are many Christians who do not faithfully study their Bibles. They attend Bible class without having looked at the day's lesson. Some read their Bibles but do not understand. Others claim that they can't understand the Bible, so they rely on others to explain it.

There are several aids available to those who really want to study their Bibles. Of utmost importance, of course, is a good Bible with references. Other helpful sources include a Bible dictionary, a standard concordance, a good English dictionary, and commentaries written by Christians (such as the *Burton Coffman* or the *Gospel Advocate* commentaries). Two fine books by Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers #1* and *Questions and Answers #2*, can be purchased through any good Christian bookstore.

If man would follow God's way as revealed in the Bible, all of life's problems could be solved. The Bible shows the way to happy relationships between husband and wife and between parents and children. It shows God's family how we can be part of a loving and peaceful fellowship. Most importantly, it shows us the way to attain eternal life in heaven. Let's determine that we will be students of God's word by studying our Bibles daily.

Do Not Put Your Trust in Riches

Those who possess material wealth are cautioned in 1 Timothy 6:17: *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* Wealth can be a blessing or it can be a danger. The power that comes with riches is capable of corrupting and creating sinful desires of the flesh. If we trust in wealth and put it before God, it becomes our god and causes us to sin.

Please consider also 1 Timothy 6:18: *“That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”* Wealthy Christians have many opportunities to do good, yet many times these opportunities go unnoticed or neglected. Too often wealth is consumed upon lustful and idle pleasures. Also, the amassing of wealth can become an end unto itself. Let us remember that wealth cannot bring satisfaction, peace of mind, or happiness, but tends to come between God and us.

Paul admonishes us again in 1 Timothy 6:19: *“Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”* All Christians, whether rich or poor, must lay up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20). Only in this way can we expect to inherit eternal life. Unless we prepare our lives in such a way that heaven will be our home, we will lose everything. Riches will do no good on that great day when the Lord shall come unless we have used our wealth to further the cause of Christ and relieve the suffering of the poor.

In comparison to the rest of the world, those of us who live in America are rich. If we use our wealth in the wrong way, it will cause us to be lost. We must take care not to trust in material possessions, but in spiritual things in accordance with the word of God.

Anger

Each of us needs to get a handle on anger. It is easy to lose control when we have a quick flash of anger, and this loss of control may erupt into violence. We read in Genesis 4:1-8 of Cain, who became angry and jealous of his brother Abel, and slew him. In today's so-called civilized world, a sudden outburst of anger is often the cause of murder. We are told in Matthew 5:22 that if we are angry with our brother without a cause, we are in danger of the judgment.

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). Many of us find it very difficult to get over our anger, sometimes carrying it around for years. It hurts like a knot in the side, which will not or cannot be loosened. The object of our anger may not even be aware of our pain. Christian counseling may be needed to help us with our anger.

Unresolved anger can prevent us from forgiving others. When anger is focused inward, we may be unable to forgive ourselves. These feelings can be devastating to anyone, but especially to a Christian, who realizes that we must forgive if we are to be forgiven.

All anger, however, is not sinful. Jesus got angry and drove out those who were making the temple a marketplace. He got

angry with the Pharisees, but never sinned. Jesus remained in control. We, too, must learn the difference between righteous wrath and violent anger, and we must learn to control our emotions rather than letting them control us.

James wrote about controlling the tongue and the difficulty of bringing it into subjection. When we can avoid letting angry words slip from our tongue, we will be growing in wisdom, as Christians should.

The Family

Our nation is suffering because of the breakdown of our families. Many problems in the community can be attributed to this breakdown. The Lord's church, as well, is being negatively affected.

So many families are in pain due to divorce, indulgence of alcohol and drugs, and other harmful habits. Homes suffer from sexual sins, abuse, disrespect, indecency, and a lack of spirituality. The parent/child relationship has deteriorated. The anger, pain, and heartache these families endure may result in scars that will never be healed.

Families can regain control by learning to trust God completely. We must release the hurt and distrust, and replace it with faith in God in order to know the *"peace that passeth understanding."* When we draw close to God in obedience — when we lay our burdens upon Him, faithfully trusting Him to bear those burdens — He will strengthen and guide us.

We cannot draw as close to God as we need to if we are con-

stantly fearful of being hurt. We must realize that it is much better to hurt than to feel nothing. Let us determine to put our bad experiences behind us, remove the barriers we have put up, and bravely strive to live a life filled with love and trust.

One Church

Consider the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew: *“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:18). Notice that Christ said He would build His church — singular, just one.

In the following passages we learn that there is one body and that the word body means church. *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling”* (Ephesians 4:4); *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another”* (Romans 12:4,5); *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all”* (Ephesians 1:22,23); *“And he is head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (Colossians 1:18). Some teach that the word “branches” in John 15:4-6 is referring to all the different denominational churches: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth*

forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” He cannot be referring to denominations, because Christ states clearly that if a man does not abide in Him, he is cast forth as a branch. Clearly the branches are men.

Christ prayed to the heavenly Father for oneness and unity of God’s people. Read carefully the words of John 17:20,21: *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”* How can we be united in the Father if we are not willing to obey His will by following His teachings? There is no unity in hundreds of churches (denominations) teaching and practicing different doctrines. How can all these be one in Christ if they follow a course filled with error? There truly is only one church — the Lord’s church, the church of Christ.

Maturing as Christians

The power to mature as Christians comes primarily through our prayer life and Bible study. When we pray, we are talking to God; when we read our Bibles, God is talking to us.

The apostle Paul teaches that our prayer life is to be constant: *“Pray without ceasing....In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18); that we are to pray with the understanding. *“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also”* (1 Corinthians 14:15); and that we are to have a

proper attitude and thankful heart: *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Colossians 3:17).

Bible study is essential to our growth as Christians. Paul exhorted Timothy: *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (1 Timothy 2:15). We are edified through diligent study of God’s Word. We must then strive to become teachers of the Word, reaching out to a world of lost souls.

Faith, too, is a very important factor in our prayer life: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). We cannot truly pray to God unless we believe that He exists. Consider the words of Christ in Mark’s account of the gospel: *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”* (Mark 11:24).

We need to find a quiet time every day to spend in prayer and Bible study — a time when we can meditate upon the important matters of life, especially our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Trying to Slide Through Life

There are those in the body of Christ who have lost their way and have become lukewarm in their relationship with God. Perhaps they have allowed the problems of life to overwhelm them. Even in the church we are seeing marriages ending in divorce, and children the victims of broken homes. And all because Christians fail to remain focused on Christ.

Depression has become the number one emotional illness effecting the population. This problem can often be avoided if we will only remain close to God. Instead, all too often there is a lack of commitment to the Lord. Some are trying to slide through their Christian lives, selfishly holding back for themselves. Because of this unwillingness to get self out of the way and grow closer to God, many Christians are unhappy, depressed, and confused.

At times we stop and meditate upon the church and wonder why we are not growing. If we are honest with ourselves, we will realize that we are failing to grow because most of us are not on fire for Christ. Each of us is responsible for the growth of our congregation. Every one of us can do something to help evangelize our community. We all have talents that can be used for the cause of Christ.

The church has a mission on earth, and that mission is to reach lost souls. We are the earthen vessels entrusted with the responsibility of teaching others. Resolve now to begin in your neighborhood. Try to reach your friends and neighbors. Be patient and soon there will be positive results. The Lord has said His word will not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11).

Now Is the Hour

God requires us to be totally committed to Him: *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”* (Deuteronomy 6:5). Nothing short of putting the Lord first in our lives will satisfy Him.

All too often we get caught up in the activities of day-to-day

living. We intend to give more time to the Lord, but days pass and we fail to put the Lord first. We continue to allow the cares of this world to come before the Lord. The excuse is often made, “Just as soon as I can regain control of my life, I will give more time to serving the Lord.” When will we learn that we must give the Lord control in order to know that inner peace we all long for!

God paid the greatest price — made the supreme sacrifice — in order to save mankind: He gave the life of His precious Son. The home He has prepared for all His faithful children after Judgment (Hebrews 9:27) is a prize we cannot earn, but will be given to those who are faithful in doing His will. The apostle Paul spoke concerning this in the second recorded letter to Timothy, his *“son in the faith”*: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

Now is the hour for all Christians to really use ourselves up in service to the Lord. There is hard work to be done if we are to convert the lost in our community and reach out to the rest of the world. Every soul is precious, and if we can win them to Christ they will have the opportunity of spending eternity in heaven.

When we obey the gospel of Christ we are full of joy and enthusiasm, ready to give our all to Christ. As time passes, that zeal dwindles and we may find ourselves drifting along and becoming lukewarm. Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:15,16: *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”* We must never lose sight of our responsibility to the

Lord, diligently giving of our time and talents. Now is the hour!

A Nation Without Conscience

There is a great effort in this country to lead the public to believe that nothing is wrong if you wish to indulge in it. If others are hurt, don't let it bother you. We are becoming a nation insensitive to sin.

Abortion has become an accepted way of life. If a woman decides, for any reason, that she doesn't want her baby, she can have him aborted. There is no pang of conscience. After all, many women believe this is an expectant mother's right.

Fornication is no longer condemned, but is often excused. Men, women, boys, and girls engage in this sinful act without any remorse. Many are living together outside of marriage. They apparently have no conscience about such things.

In the past, homosexuality was not even discussed in mixed company. Now the media and general public attempt to make it appear a respectable lifestyle. It is accepted by those who want to be politically correct. Some religious organizations have opened their doors to practicing homosexuals. There appears to be a seared conscience by and toward those who practice such deviant behavior.

Assisted suicide has become an issue about which we are hearing more and more. The media regularly reports of a man who has assisted yet another "terminally ill" patient in taking his own life. This "doctor" remains free to continue to put people to death. He apparently has no regard for human life; therefore he

suffers no remorse when he takes it.

Is it any wonder we are seeing people committing so many crimes against others? As long as parents rear their children without discipline, children will do whatever they wish to do, without regard for the law of the land or the law of God. We must return to the principles of God, or we are destined to become a nation without conscience.

Plan of Salvation

HEAR

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

BELIEVE

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

REPENT

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

CONFESS

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

BE BAPTIZED

“Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and

ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38); “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

LIVE FAITHFULLY

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you in prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

We come to Christ only through obedience to His word. Those who think that belief in Christ or asking forgiveness of their sins is all that is necessary in order to be saved are sadly mistaken. Unless we hear, believe, repent, confess, and are baptized for the remission of our sins, we have not obeyed the gospel plan of salvation.

Patience

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience” (Romans 5:3). All too often, when the least thing goes wrong in our lives, Christians turn away from the Lord and try to deal with problems without His help. Lives then go out of control. Satan takes over and things go from bad to worse.

We live in a “hurry-hurry” society; we want things to happen now instead of having to wait. But doing the will of the Lord requires patience. We can learn much from the apostle Paul, who

tells us in 2 Timothy 4:7,8, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*

Remaining steadfast in our faith is essential if we hope to have heaven as our home when we depart this life. The author of the book of Hebrews encourages us in the twelfth chapter, first verse: *“Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”*

All of us have times that try our faith, but turning away from the Lord is no way to handle them. Such a move can only put our souls at risk. We need, instead, to move even closer to the Lord and spend more time in Bible study, prayer, and meditation.

Freedom

We have heard the cry for freedom for many generations. The children of Israel cried out for deliverance from the Egyptians, and all through history men have fought to be free. Many have given their lives to be free from the enslavement of other men. Our own nation has heard the rallying cry for freedom. We have fought war after war in which hundreds of thousands of young Americans have lost their lives in order to preserve our freedom. But all too often, while man was fighting for freedom from bondage inflicted by his fellow man, he was becoming enslaved to Satan.

What is enslavement to Satan? Those who give in to the *“lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life”* (1 John 2:16) are under the power of Satan. It is heartbreaking for faithful Christians to see their friends and loved ones caught up in the works of the flesh: *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like...”* (Galatians 5:19-21).

We enjoy true freedom only in Christ when we obey the gospel plan of salvation: **hear** (Romans 10:17), **believe** (Mark 16:16), **repent** (Acts 17:30), **confess** (Romans 10:10), be **baptized** (Acts 2:38). When we obey from the heart God forgives us our sins, and the blood of Christ continues to cleanse us as long as we abide in Him. As children of God, we have the privilege of going to Him daily in prayer, knowing He will forgive our sins and shortcomings.

Freedom from the oppression of man is indeed a wonderful blessing, but freedom of the soul from Satan’s power is the most important freedom we will ever experience. Only in Christ can we know that joy. When we choose to follow Christ we are told to put away the works of the flesh, and to embrace the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: *“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22,23).

Only when we quit living a life of sin can we break the hold that Satan has on us. Real freedom is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32).

Servants

Each of us, as Christians, should ask himself, *Am I truly a servant of my Lord? Do I serve Him with my whole being? Do I love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37)? Am I winning lost souls? Do I find joy in seeing my brethren prosper, especially if they are more prosperous than I? Am I happy living the Christian life? What about my relationship with God — does it come from a pure and honest heart?* When we sincerely and thoughtfully ask ourselves questions about our relationship with God, we may be surprised at our answers.

Being a servant of the Lord is a great honor; true happiness is found in serving Him. We are reminded in Acts 20:35 what the Lord Himself taught, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Unfortunately, selfishness is a way of life for many, and those who have selfish attitudes live very unhappy lives.

Satan is at war with God for the souls of men. He has been deceiving man ever since the creation. Satan is constantly sending the wrong messages, placing many under bondage to him and blinding those who are under his control. In our fast-paced world, it is all too easy to neglect our duty to study God's word, pray, and serve the Lord as we should.

We must learn to seek the better things in life, and the best things truly are found in Christ. Through diligent and thoughtful study of the word of God, we will come to understand that happiness, peace of mind, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and love are found in Him (Galatians 5:22,23).

We are either servants for the Lord or servants of Satan. There is no neutral position in which we can just sit back and wait

to see who will win. The Bible is very clear about who will win this great battle: God will be victorious! Our efforts are needed in this battle; we need to be teaching and preaching the gospel, bringing the lost to Him before it is too late.

Moderation

In our time, we often see an all-or-nothing attitude in the way people live. On the one hand are those who live off the taxpayers. Millions in this group do not have the ambition to work, but expect everything to be given to them. I am not talking about retirees who live on social security; they've paid into the program and have earned what they receive. Instead, I am speaking of those who have developed a "give-me" attitude — those who expect to be supported by others.

On the other hand are the extreme opposites: Those who work night and day to make more and more money. They never reach the point at which they can enjoy what they have earned, but are always trying to become even richer. Materialism has taken over their lives to the point that they are no longer able to stop long enough to enjoy the really good things in life.

A change of attitude is needed for both extremes. Those who are able-bodied, yet refuse to work, need to develop a sense of responsibility and pride in a job well done. Those who are workaholics need to get their priorities in order and take time out to build relationships with their families.

The Lord tells us that we will always have the poor with us, and He warns those who are rich against a grasping attitude. The number of troubled families in this nation is on the increase; the

number of broken homes continues to rise. The solution is simple: We will all have happier lives if we will put the Lord first, practice moderation, and keep our spiritual lives truly committed to Christ.

Obey the Lord

Christians sometimes try to excuse their lack of involvement in personal evangelism by saying they are unable to find prospects for Bible study. Perhaps they are looking in the wrong places, if indeed they are looking at all.

There are many who are willing to study if they are approached in the right way and at the right time. Friends, fellow workers, and those who are hurting physically and emotionally make good prospects. Family members of other Christians also make good prospects. Those who visit church services may very well be searching for the Lord and would welcome an invitation to study. There are some that have visited the church for years and have never obeyed the gospel. Has no one ever taken the time to encourage them?

Winning lost souls may be the hardest work you ever do, but it will be the most rewarding. Just think of it. You can help someone prepare to live with Christ forever in heaven! There is not a more important work than this.

Winning lost souls can be the most loved work you'll ever do. What a wonderful feeling it is when the one you've taught comes to an understanding of the gospel plan of salvation, obeys his Lord in baptism, and arises to a new life in Christ!

We are the earthen vessels to whom God has committed the responsibility of teaching the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). If we are to be pleasing to the Lord, we must busy ourselves with His work.

Personal Evangelism

- I. Real Church Growth.
 - A. Comes as a result of evangelism.
 - B. Is not the same as “swelling,” which can occur when Christians move into a community.
 - C. Is the result of converting sinners to Christ — the only way overall numbers of Christians increase.
- II. Involvement Results in Growth.
 - A. Need large percentage of membership involved in order to be effective.
 - B. Those actively involved in teaching need network of support from membership.
- III. Needs of a Growing Congregation.
 - A. Unity — Elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers must be committed to the goal of being what God would have them to be.
 - B. Vision — Leadership must be able to visualize and plan for desired long-range accomplishments.
 - C. Balance — In evangelism, education, benevolence. Must avoid extremes, either to the left or to the right.
- IV. Evangelistic Education Program.
 - A. Bible class students of all ages should be encouraged to

invite others to services, always looking for opportunities to teach the gospel.

- B. Funerals and weddings offer opportunities to set up studies.

V. Christian Counseling.

- A. Affords great opportunity for teaching the gospel.
- B. Needed in every congregation; ideally, someone in leadership should be prepared for the opportunity to counsel.
- C. Is a means by which the world can be reminded that Jesus is the greatest counselor who ever lived, and the Bible is the greatest book on counseling ever written.

Discipline

Can you think of a time when people were more negligent of accepting responsibility for their actions than right now? This lack of accountability begins with our highest government officials and extends all the way down to small children. It is rare that an individual will step forward and say, “This is my responsibility and I am accountable for my actions.”

Crime is out of control in our nation. Criminals are looking for someone else to blame — usually their parents. They may argue that because dad or mom smacked them on the backside when they were little, they are not accountable for their actions. Therefore, society should not punish them. Too often criminals feel shame or embarrassment only because they were caught.

Our society needs to return to discipline. Where there is no discipline, there is no order. Not only do parents need to disci-

pline their children, but also we need to discipline ourselves. Many are trying to “grab all the gusto” they can, living by the philosophy that life only goes around once. They feel they have a right to have whatever they want. In reality, this attitude is very selfish and self-serving.

It is hard to resist such a hedonistic attitude, even for those of us who are Christians. We find ourselves getting caught up in a strong desire for physical and material possessions. We allow this desire to interfere with our Bible study and it becomes more difficult to find time to teach others and serve the Lord. When Christians refuse to take the time to carry out the Great Commission, the church fails to grow. When we use the excuse that we “don’t have time” to attend gospel meetings or set up Bible studies, we need to be reminded that one day there will be time for the judgment!

Total Evangelism

The responsibility of evangelism is not limited to preaches — it is the responsibility of every Christian. Evangelism should not be considered a task, but a way of life for every child of God. In our everyday lives, there are many opportunities to teach others. Some possible methods are discussed below.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM: Teaching the gospel through one-on-one studies is one of the most effective ways to win souls to Christ. Personal evangelism requires that we put aside our fears and be willing to confront people about their souls and where they will spend eternity.

VISITATION EVANGELISM: Those who are sick or

shut-in welcome visitors. These visits often lead to opportunities to share the gospel of Christ. When we are attentive to the physical needs of others, they will be more receptive to a discussion about their spiritual needs.

TELEPHONE EVANGELISM: This method involves using the phone to reach out to people. There are many occasions when a personal visit is not possible or advisable, and a phone call can accomplish much good and open a door of communication. In addition, many congregations are using a program known as “Bible Call,” whereby callers can listen to audio tapes of the gospel.

YOUTH EVANGELISM: Young people who are strong in the faith and who are knowledgeable about the Word of God make good teachers of their peers. Much productive work is done when young people “get on fire for the Lord.” Youth have so much energy. We must encourage them to direct it in the right way.

BIBLE SCHOOL EVANGELISM: Our Bible classes provide one of the greatest chances for evangelism. Students should be encouraged to invite friends. Teachers must remain keenly aware of their evangelistic opportunities and the responsibility with which they are entrusted.

As children of God, let us renew our commitment to Him. Let us use the talents He has given us to reach and evangelize a lost world.

Winning Lost Souls

In our Wednesday night class we are studying ways to win lost souls. We are using as a help the book, **Introduction to Soul Winning**, edited by Clayton Pepper. We have found the lessons to be very challenging. While here on earth we can do no more important work than that of winning souls to Christ. The future of the Lord's church depends upon it. Just as the blood flowing through our veins gives life to the physical body, the winning of souls gives life to the church.

Naturally, all congregations suffer loss of members due to death, moving away, and falling away. Churches which fail to convert will grow smaller and smaller. We all know of such congregations. Those that continue to win souls, however, will remain alive, happy, and productive. We need to get out of the building and into the community, bringing the lost to Christ, if we, as a church, are to continue to thrive.

We also need to befriend our new Christian brothers and sisters, making them feel welcome into the family of Christ. If we don't take this responsibility seriously, we will lose as many through the back door as are being brought in through the front. We need to be reminded just how important lost souls are to God: He gave His only begotten Son so they might be won to Him.

Take the Gospel

We have a wonderful opportunity to grow! Never have I been so encouraged by the opportunity to teach the gospel of

Christ. Throughout our communities there is a spiritual awakening and an enthusiasm to learn more about the word of God.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of God. When we sow pure seed it will produce true Christians. But when the impure seed is mixed with pure seed, we get division and confusion. This mixture well describes the “religious” world today. It is very important that the gospel of Christ is taught in its purity.

Our Christian brothers and sisters will tell you they are happy when one obeys the gospel. They are the first to say that we need more workers teaching the lost, but they want someone else to do it. They do not want to confront their friends and neighbors with matters of the soul. They may be afraid of an angry response, rejection, or ostracism. The excuses are many.

Can we think of a more horrible fate than to lose one’s soul? I certainly can’t. We feel a sense of security in being children of God, but it is possible that we may lose our souls if we fail to teach others. Many who profess to be Christians never obey the command given in Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16. We need to consider the words of Hebrews 13:6: *“So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”* It is fear which stands in the way of so many of us. It works in our lives preventing us from obeying the Lord’s command to take the gospel to the lost.

The Elderly

A large number of our elderly people have to struggle to get through the day. In many cases health problems, depression, or

anxiety complicate their lives. Nonetheless, because their generation was taught honesty, hard work, and personal responsibility at a young age, they set a fine example to others in the congregation and in the community.

Many of the elderly in our congregation are involved in such positive activities as visiting the sick and shut-ins, teaching World Bible School, sewing Caring Bears for the hospital, and teaching preschoolers in Thursday School. Others prepare food for funerals, the sick, life unit meetings, and church functions.

There are so many services that older people can perform. Some are grandparents who provide encouragement in the rearing of grandchildren. They also encourage others to be faithful in attending worship by their fine example. They will often attend services even when they feel bad, ignoring the aches and pains of everyday life.

Young people can learn so much from their elders. Grandparents are so special in the way they love and show concern for their grandchildren. It is true that they did not have to deal with widespread drug use, homosexuality, abortion, and thoughtless, random killings that threaten to destroy today's society. In many ways their days were the good old days. They were the days when most children could enjoy life free from fear. But never think they are not aware that the challenges of your world are different from theirs. Most of our older folk are wells of wisdom that young people never think to tap.

Let us not forget our elder members, but look up to them as fine examples of how to live as Christians should.

The Love We Have for God

In Deuteronomy 6:5 we are commanded to love the Lord: *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might.”* As we grow as Christians, our love for God is to grow. One way we show our maturity in the Lord is by our love for Him.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18). We see this principle demonstrated in the story of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan was willing to minister to the needs of the wounded man (Luke 10:30-37). Our love for others is demonstrated when we reach out to lost souls. We are to have enough love for our fellow man that we will do what we can to bring him to Christ (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). The happiness we Christians enjoy is a result of our love — love for one another and love for God. This love brings us precious inner peace.

We have so much for which we can be thankful. We have a sincere hope of a home in heaven — a hope that burns brightly in our hearts. When we have obeyed from the heart the gospel of Christ, we can eagerly await that time when we will spend eternity with God in heaven. We also have much joy here on earth as a part of God’s family — the church — in which we enjoy the fellowship of precious souls who are destined for heaven.

“These things I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). When we obey the word of God and show our love to God by keeping His commandments, we can know we have

eternal life. We read in Hebrews 9:27: *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”* We must take our relationship with the Lord very seriously. Our salvation depends upon it.

Do Unto Others

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus teaches what is commonly known as the golden rule: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”* Each of us should think seriously about what we would have others to do to us, then we must treat others in the same manner.

None of us wants another to harm us; therefore, we ought not to harm others. Consider the effect this principle would have on the way we treat our spouses, our children, and our grandchildren. If we would only follow the Lord’s advice, we would not have so many problems in our relationships.

Some desire to enjoy “the good life,” but are not willing to treat others fairly. All of us need to have our self-esteem built up, but sometimes we only give others negative feedback. We all need to remember how it feels when someone is critical and unkind. As God’s children, we must never be guilty of being a people who always want to be built up, but who are never ready to encourage others.

How wonderful life would be if we all treated each other in just the right way. We would live in a world where there is respect, gentleness, kindness, and love. Let’s make our lives conform to Jesus’ command for kindness.

Forgive

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14,15). To hold onto anger and resentment is a hurtful and painful act toward oneself as well as toward others. God’s forgiveness toward us depends on our willingness to forgive others. Yet many hold hurt, anger, and resentment in their hearts. Psychologists tell us that a large percentage of those who suffer from depression will not let go of feelings of anger and guilt. We must learn to turn loose of these destructive emotions!

Many of the murders that are committed today are a result of uncontrolled anger. Many domestic situations of abuse, divorce, and murder are caused by husbands, wives, and children who are unwilling to free themselves of anger by allowing God to help them forgive others. When we make a strong commitment to God and turn our lives over to Him, we must rid ourselves of hateful feelings. These things stand in the way of a right relationship with God. We must learn to love the souls of others and make an effort to bring them to Christ.

In Matthew 5:43,44, Christ said, *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”* It is difficult to stay mad at a person if you are praying for him. Christians who are busy in the Lord’s church don’t have time to nourish hurts and feed negative thoughts.

Let us put aside our anger, guilt, pain, and resentment, and truly let the Lord be the Lord of our minds.

Let Your Light Shine

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid” (Matthew 5:14). Christians who truly let their light shine are aware that they must be active. It is tempting to become passive, thinking that if we do nothing, we cannot do anything wrong. This just isn’t so. Remember the one-talent man Jesus spoke of in Matthew 25:14-30, who lost his talent because he hid it and was afraid to use it.

Brethren, living a good life is just not enough to win others to Christ. We must also work diligently for the Lord. We cannot completely do the will of God if we neglect to teach the gospel. This doesn’t necessarily mean that we must teach in a classroom or preach from a pulpit. The gospel must be taught whenever the opportunity presents itself — in the home, the office, or any place at all. The harvest is white, and God needs Christians to gather it in.

Many Christians have become weary in well-doing and have drifted into a lukewarm state. This is a very dangerous condition. Remember Revelation 3:14ff. Because the church at Laodicea was lukewarm, the Lord said He would spew them out of His mouth. It is so easy to say, “I am doing as well as others in the congregation, so I must be okay.” What a dangerous attitude! We must each stand alone at the judgment.

Each of us has a personal responsibility to do God’s will. We cannot delegate this responsibility, but must see to it ourselves.

We will all be more pleasing to God if we really get busy winning souls.

Focus on What's Right

The word *focus* is heard often these days. Webster's defines it as follows: 1) *point of concentration*; 2) *state of sharpness or clarity*; 3) *bring into focus*. We want to consider the word as it applies to our spiritual lives. We have heard Christians say that we all need to put Christ first in our lives. While this statement is true, we must realize that just saying it doesn't make it so.

People who are very successful in the business world have really *focused* upon their work, and they put forth the extra effort in order to achieve excellence. Others really focus on athletic ability or excellence in music. In order to achieve these goals, one must discipline oneself to work hard and overcome obstacles.

We read in 1 Peter 2:9 that we are to be a peculiar people: "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" Christians are different in many ways from those who live worldly lives. We must, as faithful children, focus on Christ as our Savior and grow closer to our heavenly Father. This requires a commitment of time and effort in Bible study and prayer. In study and prayer we draw upon the power of God's word and grow spiritually every day.

Whatever talent or responsibility we have in the Lord's body, we must draw upon the strength of the Lord to overcome our human frailties and stay focused upon the things which will save

our souls on the day of judgment.

Personal Responsibility

This nation is experiencing an era in which no one wants to accept responsibility for his actions. This problem reaches from the very highest of our political offices down to the very small child in the home.

Blaming others for our mistakes has become the norm. People who are brought to justice for crimes will protest that what they did was not their fault. Perhaps they claim poverty or an abusive childhood is to blame.

The problem of accepting responsibility also exists among Christians. Many Christian parents are not raising children to accept responsibility. These children grow up depending upon others to edify them instead of edifying themselves through Bible study. Often they do not become soul-winners because they doubt their own salvation.

Failure to accept responsibility affects positions of leadership in the church. Often men cannot qualify to serve as elders because elders must bear a greater responsibility than others must. The character of such men must be molded from youth. It is an awesome responsibility to watch over men's souls.

So often, children are not held responsible for their behavior. In such homes, the children are in charge and no one accounts to anyone. However, we can rest assured that God will hold us accountable for our actions. Please consider carefully the words of Hebrews 9:27: *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die,*

but after this the judgment."

Do Not Show Partiality

Paul, in his instructions to Timothy, commanded him not to show preference or partiality toward his brothers and sisters in Christ: *"I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality"* (1 Timothy 5:21).

Christians are not to show favoritism. Instead, we are to treat all brethren, from the impoverished to the wealthy, with love and respect. Ministries, which fail to reach beyond our clique of friends, will surely fail. An elder or minister's effectiveness and productivity will suffer if he shows partiality toward a select few. He must show absolute fairness when he hears complaints and must attempt to resolve problems in the congregation if peace is to prevail in the church.

Christians are to treat all people with respect and love. The apostle Peter spoke of God's nature in Acts 10:34,35:

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."

We know that our society is very competitive. It is not surprising when favoritism is shown toward those who are in a position to help us reach our goals. We should keep in mind, however, that the highest possible achievement we can realize is that of living a faithful Christian life. True greatness comes when we

humbly serve the Lord and our fellow man with all our ability and strength, remaining faithful to God until death (Revelation 2:10).

Be Thou Faithful

We should all heed the warning found in Hebrews 10:31: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* To all who have not prepared their lives to meet the Lord, appearing before God in the judgment will be a time filled with terror. The judgment will also bring terror to the hearts of those who once knew the way of the Lord, but have since rebelled and become unfaithful.

We must patiently continue to do God’s will: *“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”* (Hebrews 10:36). It is so easy to drift into a state of indifference allowing our priorities to get out of order and letting material things become too important. We then begin to neglect prayer, Bible study, and worship attendance. We must remain *“faithful unto death”* (Revelation 2:10). It is so sad when someone who has served the Lord for many years turns his or her back upon the Lord and His church. We read of the consequences of this in Hebrews 10:29: *“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”* And again in Hebrews 10:38: *“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”*

We must awaken and live every day for the Lord so we can look forward to the day of judgment with hope and expectation! Heaven can be our home, but first we must want to go there. **The choice is ours.**

Faith

In Hebrews 11:1 we find the definition of faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* Belief in God and His son Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance. Paul writes concerning faith in Romans 10:17: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* Since true faith in Jesus Christ comes from the word of God, we must spend much time in Bible study if we want our faith to be strong.

We read in Hebrews 11:6: *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* All our hope is based upon a strong belief in God, our heavenly Father, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. We must believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that every word of it is truth. John writes concerning truth in John 17:17: *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* Many people are not living their lives in accordance to the standard of truth — the word of God. Instead, they believe that whatever they say or do is acceptable if it fits the “situation” that exists at that particular time. If we really believe in the word of God, we will rely on our Bibles as the standard by which we can judge whether a thing is true or false, right or wrong. The Bible is the only reliable stan-

dard we have upon which to build our lives.

Hebrews 11 is known as Faith's Hall of Fame. Herein the apostle Paul lists great men and women of faith, men such as Abraham, Isaac, Noah, Moses, and others of olden times who demonstrated great faith in God.

A study of God's Word increases the spiritual growth of a Christian and the strength of his faith. In order to make the right choices in our lives — choices that will lead us closer to God — we must develop a strong faith in Him. Such a faith is essential if we want to spend eternity in heaven. Let us ever strive to achieve this goal.

Seek to Know God

More and more people, both young and old alike, are in need of counseling. They need help dealing with problems that are out of their control. Our entire society is under much stress, and it seems to be increasing continually. Stress affects not only those in the world, but those in the church as well.

Many put in long hours at work, sometimes holding down two jobs in a effort to make a living for their families. Everything is rush-rush, making it hard to stop and enjoy life. Material possessions are important to a point, but these things should not take priority. God must be upon the throne in our lives. We need to make time to study the Bible and mediate upon the word of God. Prayer is essential because nothing can take the place of communing with God. Prayer is vital to our spiritual growth. When we study our Bibles, God is speaking to us; when we pray to our Heavenly Father, we are speaking to Him.

Most of the problems that people encounter today have come about because they are not drawing close to God. Our lives get out of control when we try to go it alone. We must be sure that we have obeyed from the heart the gospel plan of salvation: Hear (Romans 10:17); believe (Mark 16:16); repent (Acts 2:38); confess (Romans 10:10); be baptized (Acts 2:38); and remain faithful (Revelation 2:10). As we grow in the Lord we must add the fruit of the Spirit to our lives: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22,23).

God’s Word tells us that His way is clear and can be understood by all. Spiritual health and happiness can be attained only when we seek to let Jesus Christ be Lord of our lives and follow His example in our daily lives.

Lethargy in the Church

Webster’s defines *lethargy* as sluggishness. Unfortunately, we see much of this in the church today — it seems that some members just can’t get moving. They are taught, encouraged, and pleaded with, but nothing seems to move them. They just will not become involved in carrying out work that will help the cause of Christ. Lethargy is not new to the church — it has been with us for many years — and is the main reason the church is not growing in the states as it should.

This lethargic attitude brings to mind the Laodicean church spoken of in Revelation 3:15-17: *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew*

thee out of my mouth, because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked....”

Christians do not generally start out being lethargic, but drift into it. Many become weary in well-doing, then begin to ramble along. Many parents and older Christians do our young people a disservice when they set a sluggish example. Our young people need to see committed Christians at work.

We need to realize the seriousness of the charge God has given us: Take the message of salvation to a lost world. In order to carry out that commission (Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16), we must prepare ourselves to be teachers of the Word and be busy doing the will of our Lord. There is no excuse for us not to know the gospel. In addition to the Bible, we are blessed with excellent preachers and teachers who present the Word to us, trying to help us grow. We are the earthen vessels — the only means. When we fail, the job goes undone.

Men and women are dying every day, not having heard the gospel of Christ. It will be a sad day indeed when we stand before the Lord on that great day of judgment and someone turns to us and cries, “You never mentioned Him to me!”

Baptism Is Essential

Please consider carefully the words of Mark 16:16: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* In this passage we find Christ, just before His ascension into heaven, instructing His disciples concerning the

great commission. Christ teaches here that baptism is essential to our salvation and that we must do more than just believe — we must also be baptized.

We read again of the necessity of baptism in 1 Peter 3:21: *“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* This scripture plainly teaches that baptism saves us.

The Gospel Plan of Salvation is made very clear in God’s word. We read in Romans 10:17 that we must **hear** the word: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* Hebrews 11:6 teaches the necessity of belief: *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* Acts 17:30 tells us that we must **repent** of our sins: *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”* In Romans 10:10 we find that **belief** and **confession** are necessary: *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* In Acts 2:38 **baptism** is commanded: *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* And finally, we are to **live faithfully**: *“...be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10).

Be Responsible

We are quickly becoming a society in which no one is held

responsible for his actions. A lady bought a cup of hot coffee in a restaurant, spilled it on herself, and then proceeded to sue the restaurant. A man rode his bike at night without a light or reflectors, causing him to be involved in an accident. He sued the bicycle company. These are just two of the many thousands of examples that show our society as a whole does not accept responsibility for its actions.

The world is full of whoremongers, homosexuals, alcoholics, abortionists, rapists, drug addicts, thieves, child abusers, spouse abusers, etc. These sins exist and the resulting problems continue because people are not forced to accept responsibility for their actions.

Children, in years past, were taught responsibility at a very early age by responsible parents. They had jobs assigned to them and they were required to complete those jobs. They were not allowed to talk back or talk their way out of doing their chores. Many children today intimidate their parents, and in many cases, the kids actually run the home.

Christians are being made more aware of this attitude as it has its effect on the church — homes wrecked by divorce, babies born out of wedlock, social drinking, dancing, profanity, and promiscuity, especially among teenagers. Once again, we see the results of failure to accept responsibility.

This lack of responsibility could very well destroy the church of the Bible, as well as civilization as we know it. Something must change — people must accept responsibility for their actions. We must learn to always be truthful and to stand for that which is right. Parents must realize their own responsibility to God, and must hold their children accountable for their actions in order to build them up morally. Only then will they grow up to

be the kind of people capable of making a commitment to God and keeping it.

Rush, Rush

The lives many of us lead today are so rush-rush. We get in such a hurry that many times we don't get adequate rest. We all need time to rest, as well as time to meditate on God's word and to pray.

Many in our society suffer from some form of depression, due partly to our fast pace of living. Once depression has set in, we may feel that the prayers we offer do not reach up to God. On the other hand, when we are feeling good and have a positive outlook and are not bothered with depression, it seems that our prayer life is good and our prayers reach up to God. At these times God usually seems very near.

Depression afflicts many people, sometimes even children. And there are varying degrees of depression, ranging from slight to a more severe, deep depression. It is important to seek counseling if the depression continues to be a problem. Yes, even Christians get depressed; depression is no respecter of persons and may affect anyone.

Our lives are full of choices. We are constantly making decisions and some are very difficult. The thing we need to remember most is to have our priorities in order: God first, then other things according to their importance.

The possession of material goods has become so important to many that they have made the pursuit of "things" their God.

Many work to the point of exhaustion and do not have the energy to devote to the truly important things in life. The relationships between husbands, wives, and children always suffer because of the desire for material possessions. There is no way that the desire for “things” can be satisfied.

As Christians, we must center our minds on those things which will endure for eternity. These spiritual concerns will determine where we will spend eternity. Laying up treasures in heaven is the truly important goal in life.

Attitude Toward Elders

Men who serve as elders of the Lord’s church have a great responsibility, both to God and to the congregation. Consider 1 Timothy 5:17: *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.”* There are instances when an elder may desire to make the work of the eldership his full-time occupation and he may be appointed to that task by the eldership. Then, as the Bible teaches, he is to be supported by the church. That is the meaning of the phrase in verse 17, *“counted worthy of double honor,”* and continuing in verse 18, *“For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward.”*

Our attitude toward the elders should be positive; we are to love them and give them the respect they deserve. In fact, we are **commanded** to do this in Hebrews 13:17: *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy,*

and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Elders have the greatest responsibility on earth — that of watching for our souls. Our souls (or spirits) will live forever. Our elders are constantly aware of this responsibility, and are careful that we are being taught and that we are teaching only sound doctrine.

Where we stand in eternity is so very important! If we go to heaven we will have everlasting joy, but if we go to hell we will have everlasting punishment. Thank God for men who are Godly elders, who help us as we travel the narrow road with the strait gate! Let’s strive to make theirs a work of joy and peace.

All Christians Are Servants of the Lord

It seems to be difficult for some Christians to think of themselves as ministers of God. All Christians are servants, thus they are ministers. We have made a great difference between ministers who preach the gospel and receive support from the church and brethren who do not receive support from the church. I believe this is one reason many will not accept the responsibility of being soul-winners.

Personal evangelism is a work that came into its own during the time of the early church when persecution fell upon the church at Jerusalem. We read about this in Acts 8:3,4: *“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”* This is the reason the early church grew so fast.

During the last 30 years we have become more like the early church in winning souls for Christ. For a number of years prior to this period we had very few conversions except at gospel meetings, at which time several might obey the gospel. Thankfully we are now evangelizing throughout the year, realizing the urgency of obedience.

Paul, speaking to the elders at Ephesus before he departed to Jerusalem, said in Acts 20:20: *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house."* Paul set the example for us to follow. We must teach publicly and from house to house if we expect to reach the people in our community with the gospel. Personal work is the most effective way to reach lost souls. Many could be working in this way for the Lord if they only believed they could.

Is Christ Ruler and King Now?

Let us consider the following passage found in Ephesians 1:19,20: *"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* Paul further taught the Corinthian brethren: *"Then cometh the end, when he shall*

have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

We who are in the kingdom (the church) have such a wonderful Savior and Ruler over us! He died for us, shedding His precious blood that we might have eternal life. And because He is our perfect example, we must let Him guide our footsteps and walk in the way He has set for us to go. We need to strip worldly thoughts from our minds and center our thoughts on Him, realizing that He is Lord of Lords, and acknowledging Him as Lord of our lives. We must love and honor Him and let Him abide in our hearts, so that someday we may be with Him in heaven.

How Does God Feel About Division?

There have always been, and unfortunately always will be, disagreements within the Lord’s church. The apostle Paul, because of dissension in the church at Corinth during the first century, admonished the brethren there: *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Brethren may disagree on doctrinal matters at times, but if we will study together and work toward an understanding of God’s word, peace will usually pre-

vail.

Problems due to personality differences, however, are much more difficult to overcome. Trouble can spread throughout the entire congregation when brethren are at odds. Because of a personal dislike for one another, they may ignore the Lord's command for unity. Notice further in the Corinthian letter Paul continued to reprove the brethren: *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"* (1 Corinthians 3:3). Congregations of the Lord have divided because of differences between strong, proud men and women who want their way at any cost.

As Christians, we must continually work to gain knowledge by studying God's word. And, at the same time, we ought to pray for wisdom that we may properly handle the knowledge we have gained. When we truly love the Lord, His church, and one another, the desire for unity will abound. Let us ever strive to live closer to the Lord, turning from the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) which weaken the Christian's resolve to be faithful unto death (Revelations 2:10).

We are a special family of God's people. We should be united. We must remain strong in the Lord.

Christians Must Be Committed

Sadly, there are many Christians who do not faithfully assemble with the saints when they come together to worship God. This practice is not in keeping with Hebrews 10:25ff: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of*

some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

It could be that these Christians do not realize the seriousness of missing the assembly. They are not permitting God to be first in their lives. Maybe they haven't stopped and counted the cost of being a Christian. Every child of God must take the time to pray and meditate and study God's word. We must be so committed to Christ that we will make whatever sacrifices are necessary to worship Him.

Christ was the only one who could be an acceptable sacrifice for sin. There is no other that God will accept because only Christ lived a perfect life. We contact the blood of Christ through scriptural baptism; His blood washes our sins away and we are born again into God's family, the church. Christ's blood continues to cleanse Christians of our sins as often as we truly repent and ask God for forgiveness. This is indeed a great blessing! It is very dangerous to engage in willful sins. We must not try to tempt God by doing so.

Continuing further in the 10th chapter of Hebrews, let us consider these thoughts: *“He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a*

fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (verses 28-31).

Doctrines of Men Forbidden

(Part I)

The Bible has many uplifting things to say, but it is not all positive — there are negatives also. We read in Matthew 15:8,9: *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* We need to let such passages be a warning to us.

Many in the religious world just pay lip service to Christ. They have not taken the time to really study God’s word to see if the things they are teaching are so. There are those who profess to be Christians, yet do not understand what they must do to be saved. When the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch. As Christians, we must be committed to teaching so others can have opportunity to hear the gospel plan of salvation. We must teach with understanding and also with the assurance that our own hearts are right with God. Only in this way can we be right in the things we say and do.

God’s children must be sincere in our worship of Him. Anything less than a pure heart and a sincere commitment will be rejected as hypocritical. If we have this type of commitment we will devote much time to prayer and meditation, and the material things of this world will not stand in the way as we strive to put God first in our lives. Please read and consider Colossians 2:20-

23: *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.”*

Doctrines of Men Forbidden

(Part II)

We need to pay careful attention to the words of Jesus as He quoted the prophet Isaiah in Matthew 15:8,9: *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* The religious world is filled with those who are teaching the doctrines of men as Biblical truths. Some of these “teachers” are very sincere about their religious beliefs, yet they have failed in their responsibility to really study the Bible and rightly divide the word of God. Many followers, therefore, are being deceived, believing these false teachings to be Biblical doctrines. It is sad for all concerned when people fall prey to the doctrines of men.

Consider Paul’s admonition to the saints at Colosse: *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?”*

(Colossians 2:23). Some claim to believe in God, but their view of Him is distorted. Some believe that God will accept all those who are sincere, regardless of the doctrines they believe and practice. It is as if they expect God to accept anything man chooses to believe.

God has given us a pattern to follow in becoming a Christian: We must believe, repent, confess, and be baptized for the remission of our sins. He has given us a pattern for our worship: We are to sing, teach, pray, give, and partake of the Lord's supper. He has also given us a pattern for the organization of His church: Christ (the head), elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, and members. These patterns are not difficult to follow. Let's not fight against God, but truly submit our will to His through a study of the Word and obedience to the Scriptures.

Spiritual Maturity

Most will agree that a decline in growth of the local congregation is caused mainly by the lack of spiritual growth within individual Christians. If each Christian truly grows spiritually then the whole congregation will be more spiritual. As a result our numbers will increase. Finding a way to help individuals achieve greater spirituality or maturity has been an issue among elders and ministers for many years.

Some congregations have moved in the direction of outward activities to try to stir the emotions of the members, such as waving their arms above their heads during singing or prayer, clapping hands during singing, and singing during the Lord's Supper. Apparently the idea is that the stirring of emotions shows spiritu-

al growth.

The Pentecostals for many years have tried to demonstrate their spirituality to the world by outward activities — shouting, rolling on the floor, walking the seats, dancing, and jabbering in what they call the unknown tongue, believing that the more they carry on, the more others will see their spirituality. The truth of the matter is, these outward activities do not tell us about the spiritual growth of a person at all.

True spiritual growth comes as a result of **Bible study, prayer, and meditation.** **Faith** plays a very important part in our spiritual growth (Romans 10:17). Spiritual growth takes place inwardly and brings about a change of heart. As we move closer and closer to the Lord we will add the fruit of the Spirit to our lives (Galatians 5:22,23). There will not be a lot of outward emotional activity, but peace, love, joy, and gentleness will become evident in our lives.

Uneasiness in the Nation and in the Church

A feeling of uneasiness is sweeping over our nation. We see people who are restless, who feel they are on the verge of some dramatic happening. Change has been taking place in our nation for years, but for the last thirty years it has been very fast-paced. Honesty is no longer important to our leaders in government; abortion, homosexuality and fornication are accepted as the norm among many people, including our officials in high places.

This same uneasiness that is sweeping society is felt in the church. Many churches and members are calling for change. It is no longer enough to be dedicated to believing and practicing the things which are clearly taught in the Bible. Changes are taking place in many areas — in the way scripture is being interpreted, and in emotionalism, which is taking over in many congregations. Some congregations are trying to change their worship by singing during communion and clapping their hands during spiritual songs. Some Christians are making statements such as: “We are not the only Christians — we are Christians only;” “We trace our heritage back to the Stone and Campbell movement;” and “There are hundreds of names for the Lord’s church.”

I am convinced that these changes are a departure from God’s way. I am convinced that the church of Christ which is outlined in the New Testament **has been restored**. I believe we can improve on our worship by becoming more committed to God and by truly making Christ the Lord of our lives. We can also improve our worship by carrying out the commands of our Lord and by being sure we learn from the inspired pattern we have been given.

To engage in singing during communion would distract from our personal meditation upon the Lord’s death. Would we sing during preaching or prayer? The practice of hand-clapping is used to play upon the emotions, and is simply not authorized in the scriptures. We are authorized to teach and preach God’s word, sing, partake of the Lord’s supper, pray, and give back to God some of what He has given to us. Why can’t we be satisfied to do these acts of worship in an orderly way without trying to change the written word of God? The phrase, “If it’s not broken, don’t try to fix it,” is certainly applicable.

Wake Up and Get Busy

We are admonished in James 1:25: *“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deeds.”* There are many works required of Christians, one of which is teaching the gospel to the lost: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:19,20).

Consider also Proverbs 11:30: *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”* And James 2:24: *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* Winning souls is a work that demonstrates our wisdom. It is essential that Christians teach those in the world the plan of salvation, and then teach them to be obedient to all God’s commands. Those who receive the word and are baptized into Christ are added to the church: *“Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47).

We are the earthen vessels to whom God has entrusted the responsibility of spreading His word. If we are to carry out our mission as the church of the Lord, we must be busy trying to spread the borders of His kingdom. Many people who profess to be Christians — members of God’s own family — do not get involved in reaching out to the lost. If we will only awaken from the sleep of idleness, we will see the church grow. We need to

get busy carrying God's message of God's word to a lost world, as did the early church in Jerusalem. When they suffered persecution, the Christians were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4).

Morals Are Important

As I observe many of the older generation passing from this life and going on to the next, I can't help but wonder about the younger generation. How will they cope with the many problems in our present and future societies?

The older generation lived during a time when integrity, honesty, responsibility, and hard work were the way of life. Young and old alike were expected to be morally pure and set good examples before others. The family name was important, and all family members tried not to bring reproach upon that name.

Even though our highest government officials did not always live pure lives, we did not hear the terrible things about them that we hear about our leaders in government now. I would never have believed that I would live to see the day that our highest official would support abortion on demand, homosexuality, fornication and other immoral acts. Unfortunately, this seems to be the direction in which our world is going.

The Bible teaches that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It not only teaches by word, but patterns are given throughout God's word so that we can know the way of salvation. It is so very important to obey the plan of salvation. When we obey, our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ and we are added by God to the Lord's church

(Acts 2:47). We then must remain faithful until death (Revelation 2:10).

The church is composed of those who are “called out” of the world through obedience to the gospel. In this spiritual family of God’s people we find hope, joy, peace of mind, and a life that is committed to the Lord. We find the very best of morals (based upon the word of God) in the lives of those who are faithful Christians.

My prayer is that God will help each of us to live every day for Him. Then someday, when this life is over, He will take us home to be with Him forever!

New Year’s Resolution

The new year is almost upon us. We need to ask ourselves what we have done for the cause of Christ this year, and what we want to try to do next. As we look back over the past year, we reflect on many events. There were many opportunities for each of us to do good. We took advantage of some of them, but many slipped by us without any action being taken.

We all need to ask ourselves a couple of questions: Am I better prepared to meet the challenges of the future? Am I ready to make the most of my opportunities to do good this coming year? We should prayerfully consider giving ourselves more fully to God, thereby making ourselves more productive. Winning souls for Christ should be the desire of every Christian. If you feel you do not have enough knowledge of God’s word to teach others, you need to commit yourself to Bible study. Then apply the principles you learn from His word to your life.

The number of personal Bible studies in the church decreased in the '60s and '70s. Church growth came to a standstill because Christians quit involving themselves in personal evangelism. The church is just now waking up to the need of getting back into the soul-winning business. Many Christians are timid and withdraw from anything that calls for confrontation. Confronting doesn't have to be difficult. When it is done gently and kindly, those who are confronted are usually very considerate and accepting.

Leadership needs to be developed in each congregation, especially in the area of evangelism. We need brethren who will follow and are willing to give of their time and energy. Every member of the Lord's church should not only be concerned about our own souls, but also the souls of others. If this concern is strong enough, it will cause us to work tirelessly.

Let us all resolve to be about the business of winning souls. This is the greatest work on earth.

Joshua and Rahab

Chapter 2:1ff

Joshua sent out two spies to go view the land, even Jericho. *"And they went and came into an harlots house, named Rahab, and lodged there."*

V2 *"It was told the king of Jericho that men who were children of Israel came that night to search out the country."*

V3 *"And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab saying, Bring*

forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they have come to search out all the country."

V4,5 *"And the woman took the two men and hid them, and said thus, 'There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were, and it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.'"*

V6 She brought the men up to the roof of the house, and hid them with stalks of flax.

V7ff Rahab told the spies that the inhabitants of the land were faint-hearted because of them.

Rahab made the spies promise that she and all her house would be spared when they took the land. They promised, providing that Rahab have them all in her house at the time the Israelites took the city. It came to pass that they took the city and spared Rahab, as they had promised. Rahab, even though she may not have seemed significant, became very important in her role of hiding the spies and in reporting Jericho's fear of the children of Israel.

We may feel that we are not important, but as God's children we can do many things that can make a difference for good. Let's be about our heavenly Father's business.

Sin

Satan tempts us to sin in three different ways. We find these in 1 John 2:16: *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father,*

but is of the world.” Let us consider also verse 17: *“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”* Here we find that sin enters the life and separates one from God. We must be alert and watchful that we do not fall prey to temptation.

Paul admonishes us in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* We are living in a world that has a hunger for sin. Many in the world rush headlong into all kinds of sinful acts, never taking the time to consider that sin comes between them and God. Nor do they consider that sin has consequences that may last a lifetime. Many lives have been ruined because of a desire to have something that they should not have, but they went ahead and indulged themselves in that sinful act. Having given in to sin, they now must live the rest of their lives with the consequences of their actions.

It is understandable that those in the world who are not spiritually minded would get caught up in sin, but it is difficult to understand why those who profess to be Christians let the world come into their lives and do not find the strength to walk away from it. When Christians become entangled in sin it not only brings reproach upon the church, it also causes them to lose their influence for good. They are no longer letting their lights shine, but are floundering in sin without finding a place to repent. Brethren, we must walk away from sin and not let it entrap us.

A Risen Savior

Those of us who are Christians serve a risen Savior! We read in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 that there were many witnesses who saw the Lord after his resurrection: *“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”*

The most important historical event ever was Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection on the third day. Without this event man would be hopelessly lost — there would be no ransom paid for us. The blood of Jesus shed in His death is the only element that could wash away our sins.

You see, we have all sinned: *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). To be free from our sins we must come in contact with Christ’s blood, which we do when we are buried in baptism for remission of our sins. While in that watery grave, our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ: *“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:3,4). When we are born again through baptism and are resurrected to walk in a new life in Christ, we are also added to the Lord’s church: *“...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be*

saved” (Acts 2:46).

The wonderful Son of God died for all mankind so that man could be saved. We need to thank God every day for this marvelous gift so freely given for us.

Don't Be Like the Opossum

When I was growing up on the farm in Northeast Mississippi my brother and I would get to go opossum hunting with our uncle on occasion. We'd prepare for the hunt by parching a pan of peanuts in the shell, then we'd fill our pockets with peanuts and pack up a flashlight (to spot the opossums in the tree), chopping ax, and tow sack. Our uncle had a fine hound dog that was good at treeing the opossums, so he'd bring his dog and a lantern. Some nights we would get our sack full — maybe six or seven opossums — and we'd take turns carrying the heavy sack. We'd take the live opossums back to our uncle's house, where he would kill and skin them.

A really fascinating characteristic of opossums is the way they become sullen and play dead, especially when they feel threatened or when they're handled.

I related the story of our hunts in order to make a point. Have you ever noticed how like the opossum some people are? We become sullen when asked to do something we don't want to do. And this is not just a problem of teenagers, as some might think; adults are just as guilty. We are very spoiled to getting our way, and often lack the discipline to patiently do things we don't like to do, no matter how badly the task needs to be done.

Being involved in personal evangelism is a great privilege. God has entrusted us with carrying the gospel to a lost world. We are the earthen vessels He uses to teach His word, yet many are taken aback when asked to reach out to lost souls. Some become sullen and resentful when asked to prepare themselves to teach the gospel. Instead of being resentful, we should consider it a great honor to teach others about Christ. My prayer is that more and more Christians will prepare themselves to teach the word.

Our Relationship with God

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). We know we are to love our wives enough to die for them, that we are to love our children enough to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We are to love our spiritual family, the church, with a pure heart fervently. There are, however, some people whose lives are in such turmoil that they have trouble even loving themselves.

Many people have had so much hurt and emotional pain in their lives that they carry anger within their hearts. They rebel against anyone or anything that calls for them to humble themselves. These same people miss out on so much in life! They could know so much peace if only they would add the fruit of the Spirit to their lives: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22,23).

So often in life people are their own worst enemies. Many of their thoughts and actions are contrary to happiness. In spite of

having the capacity to love and enjoy things that are right, they continue to refuse to completely surrender themselves to God's will. They fight against the very things that would put them in the right relationship with God. Thus they live unhappy lives.

We must do away with those things which stand in our way of loving God completely. When we sing the song, *"I surrender all,"* let us sing it sincerely. If we will indeed surrender all, we will enjoy a relationship with God in which love, faith, trust, and hope of eternal life abides. Let us remember that all that really matters in this life is our relationship with God, because this relationship determines where we spend eternity.

Reaching Out to Lost Souls

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the great commission in Mark 16:15,16 and Matthew 28:19,20. This commission was not only intended for the disciples of that day, but for us as well: *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:3,4). Christians during that time had a strong desire to teach the word to others. Could it be we are too comfortable with our freedoms and protection from abuse?

The apostle Paul, in speaking to the Ephesian elders said, *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:20,21).

There are many methods of teaching. We may choose face-to-face evangelism, a personal study with those who are lost. We may teach by using such tools as printed material, radio, television, computers, etc. But by far the best and most effective way to teach is to set up Bible studies with those who are lost and personally teach them the Gospel of Christ!

The New Testament church has been restored in the gospel plan of salvation, the organization of the church, and the worship of the church. It is our mission to teach those who are lost and bring them into the fold of God. We must be diligent in our study of God's Word in order to prepare ourselves for the task of teaching others. We then must put that knowledge to work as we go about our Father's business.

Isn't it amazing how we can get so excited about preaching the gospel to the poor in some third world country; yet daily encounter the poor in our own community without a thought as to feeding their hungry souls the Word of God!

The Will to Discipline

Parents make a serious mistake when they fail to discipline their children. Because of this lack of discipline, many children grow up to be very rebellious and selfish, bringing heartache to their parents. We can read in 1 Samuel 2-3 that Eli's children brought shame upon him because he **failed to discipline** them. Parents sin against their own children when they do not teach them to be responsible and work for the things they want.

Parents often sacrifice to satisfy their children's wants, even when these "wants" may be harmful. It seems we have forgotten

what the Bible teaches about raising children and are following the ways of the world. We should take a serious look at the number of crimes being committed by young people: the thefts, the sexual promiscuity, and even murder. Many of the younger generation are living together without the benefit of marriage, having children out of wedlock, and many choosing abortion.

No one will argue that we are living in a difficult time. Children, however, not only need limits, they want them. Many young people are out all hours of the night and their parents have no idea where they are. Drinking, drugs, and illicit sex have become a way of life for them. Because their peers are unrestricted and are participating in all kinds of sins, the job of Christian parents is much more difficult. It is going to take the best we have to offer in order to discipline and control our children.

Parents, do your best to bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. *“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). Daily devotionals — prayer and Bible study — need to be a part of our lives and our children’s lives. Take back the control of your homes and love your children enough to discipline them.

Neither Add To Nor Take Away From the Scriptures

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1-6: *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-*

suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Humility (lowliness and meekness) is an essential part of a Christian's character. To esteem others better than ourselves is something all of us need to practice in our daily lives. To be lowly and meek is not a sign of weakness; rather it is a sign of great strength. Moses is said to have been a meek and humble man (Numbers 12:3). Christ set the greatest example of humility (Philippians 2:5-8). Both Moses and Christ showed great strength by their determination to serve God.

Another word for longsuffering is patience. We are told in the scriptures that we must not grow weary in well doing, but remain faithful all the days of our lives. Patience is something many of us need to practice. Our world is very fast paced, but we must never become so busy in the ways of the world that we neglect living the Christian life. We are missing something very satisfying if we do not take time to seek lost souls.

The passage above also tells that there is one body, and that Christ is the head of the body: *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18). We need to consider carefully the seven "ones" mentioned in Ephesians 4: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and one hope. Let us strive to come to an understanding of the scriptures, and may we never be guilty of adding to or taking from God's Word (Revelation 22:18,19).

The Wisdom of Soul-Winning

(Part I)

We are not growing, brethren, because we are not taking the gospel to the lost. We are not confronting people face-to-face with the gospel. The world is filled with prospects. There are those all around us who are lost, having never heard the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps we fail to confront others with the gospel because we think no one will listen. We may feel that if people were really honest and sincere they would seek us out by coming to our services. However, when they do come, about all most of us do is invite them back again. Then, if they don't respond in a short time, we may rationalize by saying, "Well, they are just not listening". Brethren, the problem is not that no one is listening — the problem is that we are not talking the gospel. So many of us have difficulty confronting others about their souls. While we must work to overcome this fear, there are other ways of encouraging. We can and should invite folks to services, and we can live in such a way that will cause someone to ask about the church. You have heard it said, "No one cares how much you know until he knows how much you care." This is a very true statement. We must care enough to confront the lost with the gospel of Christ. We must study God's word in order to prepare ourselves, and we must pray that God will guide and strengthen us in this task.

In Matthew 28:19,20 Jesus directed his eleven apostles: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them*

to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." What do you suppose the eleven thought — that the mission was impossible, incredible, unattainable? Imagine for a moment that Jesus gave this same commission to eleven men today and that you were one of the eleven. What would be your reaction? Could you say as the apostle Paul did, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). Paul told of the reactions of the early Christians who faced this task: *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; We are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed"* (2 Corinthians 4:8,9). What is your reaction when you realize that "go ye" really means "go me"? *"Go ye"* was a part of the Great Commission to the apostles; today it is still the commission of New Testament Christians. While many Christians will admit that the command is as much in effect today as when Jesus spoke those words from the mount of ascension, they do little about it. Christians must accomplish two things if we are to be obedient: First, we must **teach** and **baptize** the alien sinner; second, we must endeavor to restore delinquent or unfaithful Christians, *"teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."*

Brethren, we must begin now to reach the lost.

The Wisdom of Soul-Winning

(Part II)

Christians obey God when we comply with the commands, examples, or necessary inferences which are revealed to us

throughout the New Testament. In Mark 16:15,16 we find the command “...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Christians should desire wisdom, and Proverbs 11:30 tells us how this wisdom can be attained: “He that winneth souls is wise.” Men have gone to great lengths to gain knowledge and share that knowledge in an effort to become wise. Considerable effort is put forth to earn graduation certificates of all kinds, but the simplest way to be wise in the sight of God is to win souls.

The desire to go teach the gospel must begin by first developing a love for God, and then a love for others. We must then leave the comfort of our church houses and go into the community, having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). The first words of the Great Commission are “Go ye.” The command to go comes before teaching, preaching or baptizing, and going with the gospel begins with feet. Many Christians sit in the worship service and sing “Bring Them In,” never considering that we have been instructed to go out and get them! Christians should realize that the greatest work on earth is to convert people to the gospel. Someone once commented, “Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but who can count the apples in a seed?” Jesus sent forth His disciples to bear great fruit.

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 20:20). House-to-house evangelism is one area that has been somewhat restored during the past two decades, but the restoration is not yet complete. “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). This example should be an

inspiration to every Christian. Parents ought to be setting the example by teaching their children and others, and the children ought to grow up teaching others.

Why are there not more soul-winners for Jesus? Consider the following reasons:

1. The gospel is taught in the mind but not caught in the heart.
2. There are not enough caring Christians.
3. Adult Christians are not setting the example.
4. Younger Christians are discouraged and not encouraged.
5. Christians are not taught that they will be lost if they do not teach others.

Do We Really Care?

In the last thirty years a great change has taken place in our country regarding religious involvement. During the 1940's, 50's and 60's the house would be filled to capacity with people standing to hear the evangelist during a gospel meeting. Then came television sets into every home and the crowds began to drop off. We are now living in a time when even our own members can't be depended on to attend the gospel meetings.

Many who attended gospel meetings in times past were not Christians, and it was not uncommon to have 10, 20, or 30 people baptized during the meeting. This practice has also changed, as most responses and baptisms take place at the regular worship

service or at midweek Bible study. A great number of these responses are as a result of personal Bible studies.

Congregations who are not involved in personal Bible studies are missing many opportunities to convert the sinner to Christ and may find their attendance dropping off, losing more than they are bringing in. Christians who are soul-conscious will find the time to teach others because we **care** about the lost and love all mankind. This love will motivate us to talk to our neighbors and friends about the gospel of Christ.

Christians must be unselfish and must be willing to go the extra mile to lead the lost to Christ. **We must really care!**

Now Is the Time

The apostle Paul instructed: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:2). Paul pleaded with the Christians at Rome to give of themselves unselfishly and be truly committed to God. They were to be sacrificial in their giving and they were to lead holy lives. We know from the history of the early church that many were committed to Christ unto the point of death.

Not only was Paul speaking to the Christians of Rome, but to Christians today as well. We are not to be conformed to this world, we are to be transformed. In order to do this we must renew our minds and preach and teach the will of God. We are the earthen vessels who must carry the message of Jesus Christ to a lost world. If not us, then **who**? In order to accomplish this goal we must be committed to Christ and really care about souls

and where they spend eternity.

Do we hear of anyone dying for the cause of Christ anymore? This was a common occurrence in the early church. The apostle Paul made the statement that the gospel had been preached to the whole world in his lifetime. Could it be that we haven't had to pay a high enough price in the way of sacrifice for the cause of Christ? Could it be that we have never suffered for the cause of Christ and the gospel?

There are precious souls all around us who need Christ more than a thirsty person needs a drink of water. Surely there are among God's people those who are willing to pay whatever price necessary to get the Word to them. Time is running out; we must get busy now. Today is the day of salvation. We cannot, must not, put it off.

Suffering for the Cause of Christ

The apostle Paul suffered much to preach the gospel of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 22:33 he wrote of the many hardships he had endured in order to spread the gospel. He truly believed in his mission: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16).

The example that Paul set for all Christians is clear: We must not hold back, but freely give ourselves as a living sacrifice in service to Christ. *"If ye continue in the faith grounded and set-*

tled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Colossians 1:23). We must realize that if the gospel is to be preached unto every creature under heaven during our lifetime, there must be a spiritual awakening among Christians to teach and preach the word.

All Christians must understand that we are ministers (servants) of the gospel of Christ and that we must all be about the business of teaching Christ. We are God’s children and the workers in His kingdom. When we really love people and are really concerned about where their souls will spend eternity, we will awaken to the need to teach others about Christ.

The harvest truly is white and the workers are so few. The population of this world is more than five billion souls, but even though we are only a small minority, we can make a great difference. The gospel is like leaven: When it is placed in good honest hearts it will spread.

Choose That Which Is Eternal

Social classes exist even in congregations of the Lord’s church. People tend to associate with others in their educational and financial level. Those who are more affluent may influence the church in the kind of building in which they meet, their choice of elders, and the pulpit preacher who works with the congregation. Those churches who strive to steer clear of social groups are to be commended.

There is a friendliness among most brethren that is without

pretense, and that is because we love one another with a pure heart fervently. We also love the Lord. When we love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength we will see the good that exists in each of us.

Through our study of God's word we realize that material possessions do not last, but that they will perish with the earth in fire. What is important in life is not how educated we are, how much money we possess, what social levels we achieve, how much power we can bring to bear on others. It is not how popular we become, or how widely traveled we are. The most important and lasting achievement we can realize is a good relationship with God — a relationship that will ensure that our names will be in the Book of Life so we will hear the Lord say on that great day of judgment, *"Enter in to eternal life."*

Opportunity Knocks

There is a great door of opportunity open in our community to teach lost souls the gospel of Christ. This year has begun with an increase in our attendance over last year's attendance; several have been baptized or restored already. We truly are seeing a spiritual awakening among people in our community. The harvest is white, and we need to awaken and respond!

The potential is great; the question is, how will we respond? Are we going to rise to the occasion by responding to the challenge before us? We certainly cannot afford to let opportunities pass. Each of us needs to be involved in personal evangelism for two reasons: 1) So that souls will be brought to Christ, and 2) For the salvation of our own souls. Let us not forget the parable of the

talents; we will be held responsible if we do not try to teach others.

What a joy it is to teach someone about Christ and see him come to an understanding of the truth! What a joy it is when someone obeys the gospel plan of salvation! *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Romans 1:16). We have a knowledge of this gospel. Let us busy ourselves teaching others and God will give the increase.

Modest Apparel

With regard to our dress, let us consider Paul’s admonition in 1 Timothy 2:9,10: *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”* Especially at this time of the year (when the weather is warm) many people wear less and less clothing, and much of the clothing that is worn is not modest. Paul’s key term in this passage is *kosmios*, which means well-arranged, respectable, honorable. Opinions will vary as to when the line is crossed between modesty and immodesty. As Christians, we need to remember the way we dress must be according to God’s standards rather than man’s standards.

During the warm summer months many almost entirely undress, especially while swimming and lying around the pool or beach, or engaging in other recreation. Modestly has virtually

disappeared; situations that people used to find embarrassing no longer bother many.

Christians belong to Christ and must conduct ourselves in a way that will not bring reproach upon the church. *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Christians must be different from the world — not only in our dress, but also in our habits of life. We must be good examples to one another and to others so that when we teach others about Christ, they will not see in us a sinful life.

Awaken!!

Consider thoughtfully the words of Romans 13:11: *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”* The apostle Paul is cautioning us about a spiritual condition called **sleep**, which is easy to fall into. Christians must take heed that we do not become lethargic and just drift along, doing nothing to further the Lord’s kingdom.

There are many dangers facing the Lord’s church today. Entire congregations drift into false doctrine because members do not study their Bibles and put into practice the instruction of God. Many begin to accept denominationalism as a result. But one of the greatest dangers facing Christians today is that of becoming lethargic and doing nothing. Drifting into sleep produces a congregation of people who are lukewarm. God will spew those who are lukewarm out of his mouth (Revelation 3:14-

16).

Each day we live draws us one day nearer to eternity. We must awaken from our sleep, get busy and use the God-given talents we have to the glory of our Father. There is so much to do! We are pleasing the Lord only if we are obeying Him by doing the things He has commanded. We must grow spiritually, and we can do this only when we are **awake and active** as God's children.

Put First Things First

Let us consider I Timothy 4:8: *"For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* Watching some of the Olympic games on TV recently brought to my mind the above scripture. These athletes, who are the best in the world, have committed their lives to training, self discipline, eating the right foods, exercise, and getting the proper sleep and rest. Each has a good coach and strives to do exactly as he says.

Many of these young athletes, however, seem to be nervous, unhappy, and burned out by the pressures of being the best in the whole world. Many pursued this goal because they were pushed by their parents.

Similarly, we can look around us in our own communities and see the efforts parents put forth to educate their children. Many make tremendous sacrifices to see that their children receive a good education in our public schools and universities. And, in the world in which we live, education **is** very important.

But, the **most** important aspect in life is sometimes pushed aside. This is the **spiritual life**. Many parents don't put enough importance on the spiritual teaching and training of their loved ones. They seem unable to grasp the urgency of living for Jesus every day of their lives and really putting him first. *"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of life that now is, and of that which is to come."* Let's put first things first! That is, to serve God faithfully all our lives and bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!

Christian Education

When speaking of Christian education, most of the time we are referring to Christian colleges and universities. A Christian education really begins on the knee of good Christian parents who are concerned about bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The things that children are taught from birth have a definite impact upon their lives. There is absolutely nothing as important as the teaching and example of parents in the lives of their children.

Another great source of Christian education takes place in our Bible classes when the church is assembled. Next to the home, the Bible class is the most effective way to teach our children. It is vitally important that they attend Bible class, beginning with the nursery and continuing through adulthood. Many good Christian men and women have devoted much time in preparation of their lessons in order to teach our children and grandchildren about Christ. These teachers love to teach God's word, they love their classes, and they are concerned about the

souls of their students. Sadly, teachers often go for long periods of time without a word of appreciation from parents or students.

Evangelism, another great source of teaching, includes one-to-one Bible studies, preaching from the pulpit, and correspondence courses, such as World Bible School. Teaching is also done by radio, television and the written word.

There is another very effective method of learning which requires putting forth an effort and accepting personal responsibility: making a commitment to personal Bible study. Men and women who have educated themselves by studying God's word have become some of our greatest teachers. Christian colleges and preacher training schools perform a service in training young men to preach the gospel, but nothing can take the place of diligent Bible study.

Teach the Word

Great things are happening here in America and throughout the world. Many are hearing the gospel of Christ, and gradually there appears to be a spiritual awakening. People are tired of hearing what man thinks about religion; they want to know what God is saying in His Holy Word. We must go back to the Bible and learn what God would have us to do to be saved and what He would have us do to remain faithful. Jesus said in John 14:15: "*If you love me, keep my commandments.*" How can we know what His commandments are if we do not study the Bible?

As Christians we must be sure that we are living our lives in harmony with God's word. How else can we let our lights shine? The world is always looking on and searching for weakness

among us, then judging us by the weakest member of the church. In Romans 3:23 Paul tells us that we all sin: *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* It is true that we all sin, but as God’s children we do not live a life of sin. As we continue to live for God, we will find that temptation becomes easier to resist. When we do sin, however, God is faithful to forgive us. Not only does the blood of Christ cleanse us of our past sins when we obey Him in baptism, it continues to cleanse us as we truly repent of our sins.

We are living at a time when so much of the world is openly engaged in such practices that just a few years ago would have caused the most sophisticated among us to blush. Our young people are not amazed about anything; they think they have seen and heard it all. Our world desperately needs the Lord in their lives. They need to hear the gospel and be given the opportunity to obey the plan of salvation. There is no other way by which they can be saved. We must get busy. Time is running out!

How Far Have We Gone?

Materialism in our nation has reached frightening proportions. Many people are working two jobs. Sometimes the wife and husband both work different shifts, hardly seeing each other. The children rarely see the parents together, and when the family does come together both parents are so exhausted that the quality of the time they spend as a family is diluted.

The Lord’s church is also affected by this rush for material gain. Many have stretched their credit to the limit. Some have gone into credit card debt until they can see no hope of ever pay-

ing what they owe. More and more of our brethren are declaring bankruptcy. The desire for “things” affects most people, and the belief that we should have what we want, even if we can’t afford it, is common these days. We have to exercise some restraint — we are being consumed by greed!

What has happened to contentment and the desire to live simply and debt free? Why is it that those who are pushing the limits of their income and trying harder and harder to climb the social ladder are looked up to and admired by others? It is no wonder that we are raising a generation of young people who feel that it is their right to have everything they want. Many turn to gambling, stealing, and other crimes to get the things they want.

How are we, as Christians, going to be able to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20) if we are spending all our time trying to obtain material goods? We have not reached the point of no return; with God’s help we can live a more sensible and balanced lifestyle.

A Balanced Life

People have always had difficulty in leading a balanced life. It is not easy in this modern time to practice moderation in the things we do.

Sometimes Christians have difficulty in reaching a balance in our worship. Some may become too demonstrative; others may not be stirred and seem to be untouched. We must not become so rigid during worship that we don’t allow ourselves to enjoy it. There must be a balance — not overly demonstrative, yet not “unawakened” to the joy of worshiping and serving God.

When we obey the gospel of Christ we are to truly give ourselves to God, putting Him first in all that we do. This commitment should bring a peace and joy into our lives that we have never before experienced, and should continue for the rest of our lives. Such security will allow us to be happy and have balance in our public worship of our Creator.

Personal evangelism is an area which many Christians have no passion in involvement. This is the major cause of the church's failure to grow. We must get back to preaching, talking, and teaching the gospel in our homes, in our offices, and in our personal contact with people. In addition, our Bible classes and pulpits should be more evangelistic.

We applaud personal evangelism overseas in underdeveloped countries and pray for its success. We show little or no interest, however, in personal evangelism in our own communities. Where is the balance? Why should we rejoice over the soul of some person overseas more than the soul of someone in our community? We should be able to sincerely rejoice for both, not one or the other. Each and every soul is precious to God and should be to all Christians.

Humble Yourselfes

Let us consider the following scriptures about humility: *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* (James 4:6); *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble*

yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5,6); “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8); “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11); and “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).

These passages, as well as many others, teach us that a proud and haughty spirit is not pleasing to the Lord. One who manifests such a spirit will not be effective as a servant of the Lord.

I regret that I do not know the author of the following poem, but I want to share it with you because we can all learn from it.

A TEST

Sometime when you're feeling important,
 sometime when your ego's in bloom,
Sometime when you take for granted
 that you're the best qualified in the room,
Sometime when you feel that if you left,
 it would leave an unfillable hole,
Just follow this simple test
 and see how it will humble your soul.
Take a bucket full of water
 and put your hand in up to your wrist,
Pull it out and the hole that remains
 is the message of how much you'll be missed.
You may splash all you please as you enter,
 you can stir the water galore,
But stop and you will find in a moment
 that it looks quite the same as before.

The moral of this quaint example
is to do the best that you can;
Be proud of yourself and your work,
but remember there is no indispensable man.

Eternity Is Forever

Jesus was very concerned about the physical and emotional health of others. He healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk, raised the dead, and cast out demons. He did all this for a greater purpose than just to heal the body or mind of these people — He did it to turn their hearts toward God.

Many Christians today can be counted on when others are suffering physical or emotional distress, but lack concern for the souls of others. How many Christians would spend their life savings and all their material wealth to bring a sin-sick soul to Christ? How many Christians would give their lives, if necessary, to rescue some poor soul from sin? Jesus did just this. So did Paul, as did all the apostles with the exception of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ and the apostle of love, John, who died a natural death.

Brethren, when are we going to realize that the spiritual life is the only life that will last throughout eternity, that eternity is forever, and that souls outside of Christ will be lost forever? Where is our faith? Do we believe only what we can see and feel for ourselves? Let us always be mindful that material goods will perish with this old world when the Lord returns with His angels, and that only those treasures laid up in heaven will endure.

Patience in Winning Souls

Let us consider the importance that patience plays in personal evangelism. And, as teachers, we must realize that every person is different. We must continue to teach the student until he has understood the message, had the opportunity to meditate upon the Word, and has counted the cost of being a Christian.

Personal evangelism teachers sometimes become so eager to baptize the student that they don't allow time for the student to absorb the message and then base his response on knowledge. This is one reason new Christians fall away after they are baptized. Another factor that contributes to converts falling away is that the congregation does not respond to the needs of the new Christian. We may not give the support and friendship that is needed to make new converts feel that they are part of a very special family.

We must demonstrate patience by not giving up on the prospect. We must continue to show patience in teaching the word of God, always mindful that souls are so very precious! We must completely give ourselves to the most wonderful work on earth, that of winning lost souls!

Goals in Evangelism

Unless we set a goal for ourselves in evangelism, it is highly unlikely that we will ever start a Bible study with anyone. We must set out to win lost souls, then work diligently to make it happen. We might initially set a goal of winning one soul to

Christ, then when this is accomplished, our goal must become larger. We will then want to win more souls as we continue to build on that goal.

One of the difficulties we face as soul-winners is growing weary in well-doing. Many begin with much enthusiasm, but after a while lose their desire to put in the time and energy that is necessary to win lost souls. Soul-winners must possess a deep love in their hearts for the Lord and for lost souls. If we love God we will keep His commandments, and if we love the souls of mankind we will work very hard to bring them to Christ. There is no substitute for **love**.

To be effective in our personal Bible studies, we need to go back to the way evangelism was carried out in the early church. Many of the conversions that took place in the Bible were on a one-to-one basis, or one person teaching a family. Consider Saul's conversion (Acts 9), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), the heathen jailer (Acts 16:25-34) and Lydia (Acts 16:14,15). The apostle Paul spoke of preaching from house to house. When we get outside our church buildings and teach people the gospel of Christ we are evangelizing in a scriptural way.

Christ gave the great commission in Mark 16:15,16; it is also found in Matthew 28:19,20. God's people are commanded to go forth and preach and teach the gospel. We must set goals for ourselves, and we must press on in winning souls for the Lord.

Out of Control

The family is in serious trouble, many homes having been broken by divorce. Divorce causes considerable emotional suf-

fering by both the husband and the wife, but those who suffer most are the children; their world is turned upside down. They love both their mother and their father and do not understand why their parents can't get along.

Many children end up being raised by one parent, and the situation is especially difficult in such families, for that parent must work to earn a living in addition to the stress of child-raising. Even in homes in which parents have stayed together, children often rebel against their authority. As the children grow up, they often learn to intimidate their parent or parents, sometimes by threatening to withhold their love. In these homes the children are the real bosses, telling their parents what they are or are not going to do. If they want something, they expect and demand that their parents provide it for them. If the parents take a stand, the child may even leave home and go to a shelter, live with friends, or go to the streets. Many parents have completely lost control because they failed to teach their children obedience.

In years past, children who did not obey were punished. Then the so-called "experts" came on the scene, writing books telling parents that children should not be disciplined. These experts claimed that if children were made to do things they did not want to do, they would suffer emotional harm. Many parents decided that the experts knew how to raise their children better than they did, and they didn't want the responsibility anyway. So children grew up very rebellious, with no respect for anyone or anything.

Christians must set the standard for the family in our nation. Drugs, alcohol, and fornication have become a way of life for many in the world, but it must not be so in the church. We must turn to the Bible and take seriously the instruction found there,

striving to do the will of the Lord.

Move Closer to God

There is an uneasiness in many areas of the lives of Christians today. This is especially so in the feeling that many in the church are moving closer to the world and further from Christ. Satan must be very happy about the success he is having in pulling Christians away from the Lord and influencing them to walk in the way of the world.

We must strive to replace the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). Why can't we find peace, joy, happiness, and fulfillment in living for Christ? Could it be that we have not truly surrendered our lives to Him?

We are so concerned about our children and grandchildren and the temptations that they face; dangers threaten on every side. They are confronted by abortion, homosexuality, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, gambling, abuse, murder, molestation and other wickedness. Parents must set the proper example before them and teach them to say no to these temptations.

As we face more and more temptation, the church must take a stand against unrighteousness. It is especially difficult for children who are not raised in a healthy Christian home where love for God and one another is taught from the Bible and respect for things that are right is shown. Isn't it sad that sometime the local congregation of the church also fails in our responsibility to teach and encourage our young people? To survive this pressure from the world, we must strengthen our homes and the church.

The Heart

We are facing many problems in this great nation, and probably the greatest of these is that of the heart. *“For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he...”* (Proverbs 23:7). There is probably not a single problem in this nation that could not be solved by a change of heart — a change caused by the gospel of Christ. Whatever effort men put forth, they will not find the answer to this troubled nation outside of Christ.

The world is spilling over into the hearts of some of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the church is facing many problems because of it. Many fear that the church has already begun to digress. History has a way of repeating itself, and looking back we can see that man has never remained faithful to God for long periods of time. Shortly after the Lord’s church was established (Acts 2) a falling away began, and we continue to fight this battle today. Christians must guard against being influenced by those who would have us become like the rest of the religious world. We must hold on to the true word of God!

Christians have the blessing of the hope of eternal life in heaven. In order to partake of that blessing, we must discipline ourselves to take time out of our busy schedules to meditate upon the word of God, grow ever closer to God through prayer and Bible study, and remain faithful until death.

This country offers so much, but especially the blessing of freedom we enjoy wherein we may teach the gospel to others. We must try to change the hearts of men by bringing them to Christ.

Thankful Every Day

Thanksgiving has come and gone, but the blessings we receive daily from almighty God we pray will continue on. We realize that the greatest blessing God has bestowed is that wonderful gift of His son who came to earth and died on the cross, that we may have forgiveness of our sins and be added to the greatest family on earth, the church of Christ. This great family will some day spend eternity in heaven together.

We have been blessed with so much here on earth, especially our physical families and the good health most of us enjoy. Let us always be mindful of the gift of our children, that we may be the best examples to them that we can possibly be, making every effort to *“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4).

God has richly blessed us with the necessities of life — with ample food and clothes, shelter, and much more than we need to sustain life. We are blessed with freedom in our great nation, especially the wonderful freedom to worship God without fear. We pray we will not take these things for granted, but will be mindful of them and thankful for them all the days of our lives.

We must take care that we do not become jealous of those who appear to have prospered more than we have. We must not covet what others have, but must continue to be aware of all the wonderful blessings God has so richly bestowed upon us.

We Must Grow Spiritually

It is so important that children of God continue to grow spiritually. In order to do so we must begin with a study of those scriptures we can easily understand. Peter refers to these passages as the *sincere milk of the word*: “*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 12:1,2). A knowledge of the basics of God’s word is essential. This basic knowledge is an important building block as we gain the wisdom necessary to understand the more difficult passages in the Bible. We should not involve ourselves with difficult and controversial issues without first having built a firm foundation of faith and understanding.

Other passages teach us how we may grow as Christians: “*And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they shall make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:5-11). Also 1 Corinthians 15:58: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable,*

always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

We must grow spiritually in order to be pleasing to God, and we do this by being students of the Word and by worshiping God in the ways He has commanded us. We must follow the example of the early Christians as recorded in Acts 2:42: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”* Life would be so much easier if everyone lived by this rule. Negative acts, such as cheating, lying, abuse, stealing and murder, would cease to be problems. Instead our lives would be filled with positive feelings and attributes: love, peace, joy, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. If we all treated others the way we would like to be treated, there would be no crime, no abortions, no wars.

Practicing the Golden Rule is a problem even in the church. Anger, guilt, unwillingness to forgive, resentment, false pride, arrogance and hypocrisy would disappear if all lived by the Golden Rule. This rule is so simple that everyone can understand it; the trouble in following it comes from within the heart. We, as God’s children, must continually strive to let our lights shine by living the way God has directed through His Holy Word.

If we really treat others the way we want to be treated we will be serious in our efforts to teach the lost the way of salvation. We

will be genuinely concerned about their souls, and will make a very strong effort to lead them to Christ.

Too often people become self-centered and selfish, believing that their wants are the most important thing in this life. It doesn't matter to them who is hurt in the process of getting what they want — if they want something they will break all rules to obtain it. They will stubbornly insist on getting what they want, even if it is morally wrong and their own souls are at risk.

Brethren, as God's children, we must not live in this way! If we are guilty of this attitude, we must repent and grow in our Christian lives by putting on the fruit of the Spirit.

Saving a Marriage

With the increasing influence of the world upon the church, there is also an increase in divorce among Christians. Lives sometimes seem to get out of control, and one or both marriage partners may reach a point where they have real difficulty coping. Lines of communication close and they can no longer talk to one another without hurt and misunderstanding. Usually, at this point, pride and stubbornness take over and the couple needs help.

Almost any marriage can be saved if both partners really want the marriage to work, and if they are willing to put away the stubborn pride that gets in their way. Christian counseling can be of great benefit if both agree to seek it. The key is that both must want to save their marriage.

Christian marriages may become troubled when the couple

starts drifting away from the Lord. Sometimes one or both begins to neglect worship attendance, and in their private lives they neglect to pray, meditate, and study the Bible. This negligence opens the door to sin, then when sin enters it brings hurt and pain. Their thinking becomes clouded, and they have difficulty finding their way back to a solid relationship without the help of a good Christian counselor.

Nothing benefits a couple more than trusting in the Lord and being able to lay their burdens upon Him. He guides through His word, and because the Bible is the greatest book ever written, the best lessons in psychology can be gleaned from it.

Good marriages do not happen by accident — they are the result of hard work. Husbands and wives must put away false pride and arrogance, and put on humility which enables us to give a soft answer. The Golden Rule is a must for those who desire to have a good marriage. To *“do unto others as you would have them do unto you”* will make every marriage grow better as the years pass. Resolve to stay close to God and work hard to build a good marriage — pull together and stay together.

Sexual Promiscuity

In Matthew 19:4-6 we read that God made us male and female. We can conclude from this passage that our sexuality is a gift from God. God said, *“for this cause (or reason) a man shall leave...and cleave...”* Our sexuality binds male and female together, causing us to desire to leave our families and stay with our mate. Sexuality is not something to be ashamed of — it was designed by God to bless the marriage with joy and delight. Read

Proverbs 5:18,19.

The Bible picture of sexual activity places it **safely, squarely**, and **only** inside the marriage relationship. The pleasure of sex within the marriage relationship creates a bond of physical love that enhances a life-long relationship of mutual submission, unselfish love, and devotion. Read Ephesians 5:21.

Promiscuity is the very opposite of God's plan for sexual relationships. Webster's defines promiscuity as: *1) Not restricted to one sexual partner; 2) Casual; 3) Irregular; 4) Composed of all sorts of persons or things.* In other words, it is sexual relations not limited to one's husband or wife — fornication, for example (which is sexual relations with someone other than the spouse), or homosexuality, which is condemned in many passages of the Bible. Any sex act with anyone other than one's husband or wife is condemned in the Bible. See Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:13-20.

There is no doubt how God feels about sexual promiscuity — He clearly condemns it in His word! Yes, it is definitely a spiritual and physical problem. It is a terrible and dangerous problem in the society in which we live. Sexual promiscuity destroys families — it causes anger, sorrow, despair, and often divorce. It is a betrayal of trust between husband and wife and often between parent and child. If people would keep their sex lives pure and clean by abstaining from sex outside of marriage, many of these problems would disappear and there would be much more happiness and peace in the world.

Press Forward

Because God has done so much for us, selfishness is a trait that should not be named among Christians. John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:14: *“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* We, too, must be committed to really press toward heaven. If we miss heaven, our whole life will have been in vain and the reason we became Christians will not be realized.

We must have a desire to do as Paul did — reaching out to be faithful servants, making sure we are sacrificial in the giving of ourselves. God wants us to give the very best we have to give, and that gift is ourselves.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7,8: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing.”* Paul pressed forward doing the will of God. Brethren, we too must press forward to do His will if we are to receive the joys of heaven forever.

Influence

The impression we leave upon others is very important. Many people are brought to Christ because of the good influence

of Christians whom they know. Each Christian has influence, and this influence is either good or bad. Many are unconsciously affected by the influence of Christians. We may think we don't have any influence, but we do. And we can't go wrong in our lives without leading others astray.

Christians sometimes complain when we are watched by others. We must keep in mind that when we obey the gospel of Christ, we take on the responsibility of living according to God's Holy Word. If Christians do not live as we should, we are a bad influence that can cause others to be lost.

There are only two kinds of influence, and Christ spoke of the first in Matthew 12:30: *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* This kind of influence is bad, and any time a Christian acts as if he doesn't need God anymore, he is sending the wrong kind of signals to others. Paul spoke further concerning our influence in Galatians 5:19-21 as he warned about the works of the flesh: *"...Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

The second type of influence is found in Galatians 5:22,23: *"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law."* When we consider the fruit of the spirit and add these things to our lives, we will be the right kind of influence.

We must all study and come to know the Bible and live by it. By so doing, we will be the light that cannot be hidden, and our influence will be felt for good among all people.

Pornography

James 1:21: *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

James 4:17: *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”*

Romans 13:13: *“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying...”*

Romans 6:12: *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”*

Christians should familiarize ourselves with these verses; this knowledge will help to prepare us for our fight against pornography.

The word *pornography* comes from two Greek words: *porneia*, meaning fornication, illicit sexual behavior, and *graphei*, which means writing. Pornography, therefore, is illicit sexual behavior portrayed in the media through magazines, books, music, films, videos, etc.

Pornography is harmful because it is degrading — it does not build integrity, but treats people as objects. It can also be addictive, as are alcohol and drugs, causing some to feel that they “have to have it” in some form.

Pornography is linked to many forms of violence: rape, wife abuse, murder, etc. If pornography could be controlled, many crimes in our society could be brought under control, as well.

Pornography is not only distributed in places frequented by those who engage in prostitution, pandering, and drug dealing (such as sex shops, massage parlors, and strip bars), but also in “respectable” establishments — quick shops, grocery stores, drug stores, and discount stores. Those who are Christians are to avoid all appearance of evil, and should have no part of this sinful lifestyle.

Materialism

Matthew 6:19-21: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* Colossians 3:2: *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

Much has been said and written about the materialistic society in which we live. Just what does it mean to be materialistic? Webster defines materialism as *“a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things.”* Because people in this country have such an abundance, one might think that we would have all our wants satisfied. But that just does not seem to be the case. The more this materialistic society gets, the more it wants! Those who are caught up in materialism are never satisfied because they have their priorities in the wrong place.

God is not first in the life of a materialistic person. The more time one spends thinking about material wealth, the less time he

has to meditate upon the Lord. As one's appetite is whetted by desire for material things, the greater the effort he will make to obtain them.

We are to seek the Lord through Bible study and prayer, and applying that which we learn from the Bible. When we do, our interest will not be so much on material things. Our desire will be to draw closer to the Lord each day, and to know the peace of mind and happiness that comes to those who truly seek to grow in the Christian graces. (Consider Galatians 5:22,23.)

We need to take care that our spiritual lives are not choked out by the cares of this world and the desire for material things — things that will perish with time. But let us lay up for ourselves the treasure that will last for eternity.

Fear of Failure

Many Christians have the fear of failure even before becoming involved in personal evangelism. This fear robs God of the use of talents we may possess which could be used in bringing souls to Christ. In order to be successful in soul winning we must believe that, with God's help, we can teach the gospel to others, and that God will give the increase.

This fear of failure is used by Satan as a way to hinder the teaching of the gospel to the lost. Christians must learn to be brave and to use the talents that God has entrusted to us. One of the unchanging laws of life is that we lose what we fail to use. We read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14ff, and we have only to look at the one-talent man to see that one becomes a failure when he fails to use the talent which God has entrusted

to him.

A lack of self-esteem has prevented many from using the talents they possess. Many have become spectators instead of participants, drifting along allowing opportunities to pass by. Many become lukewarm due to their lack of involvement. The Lord warned of the consequences of this dangerous way of living in Revelation 3:16: *“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”* This was said of the Laodicean church; we must not let our lives become such that this can be said of us.

Thousands are dying outside of Christ every day. The harvest is white, but the workers are few. God has entrusted His children with the responsibility of taking the gospel to those who are lost. We are the only workers God has to spread the borders of the kingdom of Christ, and we must be about the business of teaching the gospel. In the great commission recorded in Mark 16:15,16 and Matthew 28:19,20, the Lord tells us very clearly that we must be teaching the gospel of Christ throughout the world. The world begins in our own community and covers the entire globe.

We Can Overcome

People suffer from various kinds of heartaches in this life. Many suffer almost unbearable emotional pain and they cannot find peace and comfort. Many times the cry for help is not recognized by others and it often seems that no one understands.

There is One who knows all — not even a sparrow falls without His knowing about it. He even knows the number of hairs

upon our heads. Our God of heaven knows the pain that man endures. Just as He heard the children of Israel groaning under bondage when they cried out to Him, He hears us today.

Brethren, as God's children we will still suffer pain and know heartache. We will lose loved ones and many times we will have trouble coping, but in spite of these difficulties, we have God as our Father and we can find peace and rest for our souls in Him. Faith in God and the hope of eternal life can lift the burden from our shoulders. We need to spend time in Bible study, letting God talk to us through His Holy Word. We also need to spend much time in prayer, talking to God and laying all our burdens upon Him, then trusting Him to bear those burdens.

The world has become more and more wicked. Situations and actions that used to be considered shameful now don't even cause people to blush. Our children are exposed to pornographic movies, television programs and books, and to vulgar jokes and speech. Never have parents had more challenges in training their children. Our children are under enormous pressure from peers and from the sin that is made so appealing to them.

The desire of the flesh is strong, but God is stronger. 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* We must not give in to temptation — we can overcome. We are not helpless; God has made it possible for us to resist.

Teaching

(Part 1)

Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived upon this earth. His teachings, which are recorded in the Bible, are read by millions every year. They bring peace and happiness to those who obey them.

Jesus had no classroom, He received no salary, He set no age limit. He had no textbook except God's word. He held no college degrees, yet no other teacher has ever possessed such knowledge. He knew His students and their needs.

Those of us who are teachers need to take heart and realize just how important teaching is. We must let Jesus be our example. We must know the Bible and teach the lessons contained in this great book, with an eye on eternity. We must realize that, when we teach from the Bible, we may very well be making that difference in our students' lives which will determine where they will spend eternity. No teacher has more responsibility than do Bible teachers, regardless of the age of our students.

The world around us is teaching all kinds of error. The world teaches the wrong way to live, which causes all kinds of unhappiness and results in the loss of many souls. But those of us who teach the Truth — God's word — can pillow our heads at night knowing we have helped some on their road to heaven. Let us never underestimate the importance of what we are doing, and may we always take seriously the great privilege of teaching God's word.

Teaching

(Part 2)

Teaching has always been and always will be essential for those who have a desire to learn. Teaching was commanded all through the Old Testament; in the New Testament it was vital to the spreading of the Gospel. Jesus taught many lessons — lessons that were very important to the saving of souls. He taught His apostles that they might teach others. The apostles taught of heaven and hell; they taught the importance of believing in God and His son Jesus Christ and of obeying the Lord's commands; and they taught that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

Teachers have played an important role in every civilization, satisfying the cry for knowledge. The need for a literate society resulted in the public school system.

Public schools have been a blessing in many ways. There are many problems, however, with the educational system in our country. Humanism is being promoted, and humanism attempts to destroy faith in God — a faith that is so badly needed by mankind today. Teachers are often restricted to material that has been selected and approved by those with a humanistic mind-set. There are many who believe in God and the Bible account of the creation, but do not have the freedom to express those beliefs.

Though education from public schools is vital to our children, there is another education of greater importance: the education they receive in their Bible classes. Teachers are exhorted to teach the word of God, understanding that the lessons presented in Bible classes are preparing students — whether children or adults — for eternity. There is no greater knowledge than that

which prepares us for heaven.

Teaching

(Part 3)

Teaching a Bible class carries with it a lot of responsibility. I say this not to discourage any Bible teacher, but rather to encourage those of us who teach to do the very best we can in teaching God's word. All Christians have responsibilities — it is part of our commitment to Christ. We must not allow responsibility to frighten us, but we must grow in knowledge and grow spiritually as we mature in the Lord. We need to look at Bible teaching as a great privilege, by which we can make a difference for good to those we teach.

Jesus was the Master Teacher. His Sermon on the Mount was one of the greatest lessons ever taught. The apostle Paul was a great teacher of the gospel. He was so committed to this end that he spent the latter part of his life teaching the truths that we now treasure so much, which are contained in the thirteen books of the New Testament written by him. Paul used at least three methods in his teaching. He taught by reason, by example, and by pattern. He also used repetition to drive home the lessons. He was willing to make great sacrifices because he believed in the message he was teaching.

Those of us who teach Bible classes may not get very much encouragement from our students or their parents, but we need to take heart, realizing that we are not preparing those we teach for this lifetime, but for eternity. We should come to know and love

our students and strive to make learning a joy. Many teachers are willing to make sacrifices in order to teach because they, like Paul, believe in the message.

Public school teachers are loved and respected and they should be, but how much more should those who teach Bible classes be loved and respected. They are not paid a salary to teach the Word; they give of their talents, knowledge, and time unselfishly. Because of their love for souls and their willingness to give of themselves, we are blessed with many good teachers. To those who are teaching, please do not underestimate your influence upon the lives of your students.

Be Thou Faithful Unto Death

The church is suffering because of the unfaithfulness of many of her members. The influence of the world is so strong that we are losing many back to it. Because the devil has many ways with which to lead people astray, Christians must be there for each other. The strong must help the weak if we are to be victorious over the world.

1 Peter 3:15: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”* Brethren, we need to set God apart and put Him upon the throne in our lives. We need to study our Bibles and become knowledgeable concerning God’s word.

It is important to really understand what God has in store for the faithful. Read 2 Timothy 4:7,8: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there*

is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Also Revelation 2:10: “*...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” Faithfulness is essential to the Christian life; we must not let anything come between us and the Lord. Heaven has been promised to those who, having obeyed from the heart the gospel plan of salvation, remain faithful unto death.

The only way we can have that hope we so badly need is to live our lives as faithful Christians. One of life’s greatest difficulties is to try to live without hope. The hope of heaven brings peace and comfort — it helps us cope with the day-to-day problems of life, and brings a special kind of joy and confidence into our lives. Remember: “*Be thou faithful unto death.*”

Without Excuse

Christians who are committed to following the word of God find peace, joy, comfort, and hope in living for Christ. There are those, however, who think of themselves as being religious, but never open their Bibles and search the scriptures to see if the hope they have is truly based upon the word of God.

Many of these so-called “religious” people live worldly lives and practice lifestyles that are immoral, yet they profess to believe in God while going about their activities with little or no pang of conscience. While ignorance of the word of God is almost universal, there really is no excuse for ignorance in this country. Most families have several Bibles lying about in their homes, yet they are never studied. This situation is especially sad

because, without a knowledge of God's word, one cannot possibly give a reason for the hope that is within him.

There are many in the Lord's church who are not faithfully studying their Bibles. We once were a people known for having a good knowledge of God's word. Now, many of us have a fair knowledge and some of us just don't know very much about the Bible. We, of all people, should know God's word and be able to give reason for our hope.

How can we, as God's people, teach others about their need to be obedient to the gospel plan of salvation and live faithfully unto death if we don't understand the gospel ourselves? Many pulpits have been criticized because they are not "edifying the congregation," but, in reality, this responsibility rests on each Christian. We must edify ourselves by a study of the Word of God.

Grief

When we lose a loved one through death or divorce, we will likely have to deal with a great deal of grief. We may become depressed for a number of days or weeks, but will eventually begin to accept the loss and go on with our lives. There are exceptions, however; sometimes people will continue to be depressed and filled with grief for a long period of time. When this happens it is advisable to seek help through counseling.

When one is depressed and filled with grief, his life can get out of control. Anxiety may set in, leaving the person overwhelmed and feeling as if he is drowning in a sea of pain. He then begins to struggle, not only to get through each day, but just

to get through the next minute. When the grieving process becomes this severe, it is advisable to see a doctor to obtain help through medication and, at the same time, to seek counseling. It is possible that the grieving person could become suicidal, needing to be hospitalized for his own protection.

Many people have anger and guilt bottled up inside which causes them to continue to hurt. Although this anger is usually directed toward an individual, it brings intense pain to the one who is angry, preventing him from finding peace in his life. It is not always easy to release anger, because true forgiveness must first take place in the heart of the one who is angry.

We need to lay our burdens upon the Lord and live as closely to Him as possible. Many times the cares of this world get to be too much to bear alone, and we find we need help. There is no one who can comfort us like the Lord. *“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God”* (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

Faithfulness

When we obey the gospel of Christ and are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47), we are ready to begin living the Christian life. Being a Christian, however, does not keep us from being exposed to the sins of the world or from being tempted by many of them. While we must continue to live in this world, we must take care not to allow exposure to worldliness to discourage

us and prevent us from living a Christian life.

Matthew 7:13,14 tells us that there are only two roads to travel in life: One is the broad road with the **wide gate** on which many travel to their destruction, and the other is the **strait gate** with a narrow way that leads unto eternal life. When we obey the gospel we enter the strait gate and get on the narrow way where only few travel. Our eternal salvation depends upon our faithfulness; we must stay on this narrow way throughout our lives.

The apostle Paul wrote of his own faithfulness: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7-9). Those who make up the body of Christ know that living for Him is the best life anyone can live. There are so many blessings that come to those who walk each day in the light — peace, joy, happiness, hope, and confidence as to where we will spend eternity.

In his letter to the Philippian brethren Paul also said, *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Philippians 4:13). We, too, should be encouraged, for we can lay our burdens upon Christ. We will find that we can accomplish much more, especially those goals of real value, by living for Christ.

When we become Christians we begin a relationship that is meant to last for eternity. Let's not grow weary in well-doing, but do our very best to remain faithful to the Lord. It is so important to have the right relationship with God.

Let Us Use Our Lives Wisely

The lack of morality in our society makes it difficult for many couples to enjoy a good marriage. Good marriages are the result of hard work and commitment between the marriage partners. Departure from moral conduct, by engaging in such acts as fornication, adultery, and/or homosexuality, has resulted in a soaring divorce rate.

God's word is very clear regarding the works of the flesh: *"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21). Each of us — young and old alike — must be on guard and must not allow ourselves to become partakers of these sinful practices.

Christians, especially our young people, are being led astray by the permissive society in which we live. The desires of the flesh are strong, but our love for the Lord must be stronger! We must develop the courage and strength to resist the immoral lifestyles of the world. It is extremely difficult to enjoy a good solid marriage if one or both partners is or has been sexually involved outside of wedlock. Too many are ruining their chance for a happy life by choosing instead the pleasure of the moment.

Bad habits, such as drinking, cursing, smoking, temper tantrums, abusive treatment of others (whether physical or emotional), and laziness are hard to accept in one's mate. As

Christians, we are to keep ourselves from these bad habits — these works of the flesh — because they are condemned in the Bible. Instead, we are to be a positive people, adding to our lives the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22,23. Let us use our lives wisely and prepare for heaven.

We Are the Sowers

It seems that everywhere we turn — at work, the grocery store, Little League ball games — there is a sense of worry. People do not understand why certain events are happening in their lives, and they are having difficulty coping. Their lives are out of control, and they are overwhelmed with decisions and the hustle and bustle surrounding them.

The church is facing a greater challenge today than we have faced in the last fifty years. We are challenged with holding on to the truth as is taught in the word of God, challenged to become more committed and dedicated to the Lord, and challenged to let our lights shine in the community. We need to be available to help those who are drowning in a sea of worldliness and despair. Brethren, in order to meet these challenges, we must become better students of the word. We must drink deep of the wisdom and knowledge found in the Bible.

There are souls to be saved. As God's workers in His Kingdom, we must plant the word into good and honest hearts. There is no other way. Only through obedience to the gospel of Christ can one be born into the family of God. We must be prepared to teach the need for faith (Mark 16:16), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Romans 10:10), baptism (Acts 2:38), and

faithfulness (Revelation 2:10). We have the responsibility to sow the seed (the word), and God will give the increase.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19,20).

People mistakenly search for happiness in material wealth and/or power, or by some other means separate and apart from God, but they end up empty. We must get our lives on track with God if we expect to enjoy peace, happiness, and the hope of eternal life in heaven.

You Can Trust Your Bible

Many people have given up on our society today. They've reached a point where they feel they can no longer trust anyone. This feeling comes as a result of broken trusts; perhaps they've been involved with business deals which were made and not kept, victimized by confidence scams, or simply been let down by those they trusted. Even those in leadership positions in the church or those who are ministers of the gospel sometimes disappoint their brothers and sisters in Christ. We are warned not to think of men above that which we should, but are to remember that all men are human and subject to making mistakes.

While we might expect deceit to exist in the world, it is sad when such is the case with those who appear to be religious. It is especially sad when a popular figure in the church drifts into error and tries to influence others to follow him. Brethren, this

should not be! No man should forsake the true word of God and, for the sake of change, teach error! Each of us, as students of the Word, need to be alert so that we will recognize error when we see it.

It is difficult to understand why people can't be trusted to do what is honest and right before God. We need to be especially careful about what is taught religiously. When we are dealing with the welfare of souls, we need to make sure we are doing and teaching those things which will help us attain eternal life. While it may be easier to carelessly let someone else do our thinking for us, **it just is not safe.** Let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling through a diligent study and application of the Bible.

Family of God

When we become Christians we become members of God's family, a very special family made up of those who have committed their lives to Christ. Christians must be busy in service to the Lord. We must love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and love our brothers and sisters in Christ. This love should be so strong that we will be willing to sacrifice our time and energy to do the Lord's will.

The great commission was given to us by our Lord in Matthew 28:19,20: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* When we truly love lost souls we will try

to teach them the gospel. Many foreign nations are eager to hear the gospel and are so receptive to it. We have the responsibility of getting the word to as many of these people as we can.

It takes strong responsible congregations of the Lord's church to sponsor missionary families and allow them to live and work in these countries. Congregations remain strong by working together to accomplish a common goal. When we grow spiritually, numerical growth will naturally follow.

Personal evangelism is very important to the growth of the local congregation. Every year there are many who pass from this life. There are some who move away, and some who drift back into the world. These may be replaced in part by Christians who move into the community, but the only way to truly increase the size of the Lord's church is to convert souls. In doing so, we will find true joy in His service.

Obey the Word of God

Many in today's religious world speak of a dream or a feeling they've experienced which they believe is directly from God. They assume this "experience" is God's way of telling them that they are saved. However, the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1:16: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* In this passage we learn that the power of God unto salvation is in the **gospel**. Unless we obey from the heart the gospel plan of salvation — belief, repentance, confession, baptism for the remission of sins, and faithfulness unto death — we cannot expect to be saved. We are taught in

Acts 10:34 that God is no respecter of persons. If salvation is available to some without obedience to the gospel, then God would have to be a respecter of persons. And we know from the scripture that He is not.

Jesus said in John 8:32, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* In John 17:17 we read, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* Also in 1 John 5:13: *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”* God’s word is **truth**. The Bible contains the word of God, and we must study it to learn what God would have us to do in order to be saved. God requires obedience of all who want to be saved. No, we can’t be good enough to merit salvation — it is a gift of God. But we are required to do something in order to receive it, and that is to obey God by studying His word and relying upon it to direct us in our obedience to the gospel.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Salvation comes to those who obey the commands of God and live righteous lives. Faithfulness is essential if we are to be ready to meet our Lord.

Paul Opposes Peter

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came

from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2:11ff).

The problem Peter had then is a problem that is still prevalent in the church today. Some seem to think that because they are from a family which seems to be more prominent — they have more wealth, or they attend a certain school, or their skin just happens to be a certain color — that they are superior. Brethren, if we can learn anything from Paul's confrontation with Peter it is that prejudice, arrogance, and conceit have no place in the Christian life. The life of a Christian is to be filled with love for those of like precious faith and love for the souls of all mankind. While it is only natural for us to develop friendships and feel closer to some people than we do to others, it is dangerous to form little cliques and to feel satisfied just to be a part of them, and to withhold love and fellowship from other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter himself taught that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Yet prejudice ran so deep in him that he was caught by Paul showing favoritism toward the Jews and being a bad influence to others. Brethren, when we do what Peter did, we do wrong. We may try to convince ourselves that no harm is being done, but it is. First of all, it is wrong to have that kind of feeling in our hearts. Second, our attitudes may well determine where

we will spend eternity. Third, we need to ask ourselves if we can honestly expect to spend eternity in heaven with those whom we refuse to fellowship or love here on earth.

May God help us to love the souls of all people and to truly love and fellowship our brethren in Christ.

Forgiveness of Sins in Christ

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:13,14). The importance of having our sins forgiven is unmistakable when we consider that we cannot enter heaven without it. The Bible is clear: We must be cleansed by the blood of Christ. There will be no sin in heaven; sin is an abomination to God and He will not allow sin in that heavenly home.

God forgives us when, as alien sinners, we obey the gospel plan of salvation. We must **hear** (Romans 10:10), **believe** (Mark 16:16), **repent** (Acts 17:30), **confess** (Romans 10:10), **be baptized** (Acts 2:38), and **live faithfully** (Revelation 2:10). We are washed as white as snow in baptism and raised from that watery grave to walk in a new life. God, through His sacrificial love for man, *“...gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

Obedience to the gospel plan of salvation assures us of forgiveness of our past sins, but does not mean that sin will not continue to come into our lives. From time to time we fall short and

need God's forgiveness, but as Christians we are not to abide in sin. The blood of Christ continues to cleanse us of our sins as often as we repent and ask God's forgiveness.

We should thank God continually for the gift of His dear Son. Let us seek to live each day for Christ.

Christ Built One Church

Ephesians 1:21-23: *"Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

Ephesians 4:4: *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."*

Colossians 1:18: *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

Colossians 1:24: *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."*

1 Corinthians 12:20: *"But now are they many members, yet but one body."*

Jesus, speaking in Matthew 16:18, said: *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* We

learn in Acts 2 that the apostles received the Holy Spirit, then Peter stood up with the eleven and told the crowd that they had killed the Son of God. This caused them to be pricked in their hearts, and they *“said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost’”* (Acts 2:38). We see in Acts 2:47 that they were *“Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”*

Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the church. Individual Christians are the members of the body — those who have obeyed the gospel plan of salvation and have been added to the church by the Lord. Let’s make sure of our salvation; we can if we will obey the Word of God.

The Lord’s Church

Act 17:21: *“For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.”* Some people today become bored if they don’t hear about something new or different on a regular basis. This is the mind-set of those who gossip. They feed on something to tell and are always looking for that which is unusual or shocking.

In light of the passage above, consider those in the church today who seem to be looking for ways to shock other Christians. One such way they do this is by referring to those in denominations as Christians, and therefore our brothers. These statements, coming from those who are supposed to know the Bible, are cer-

tainly shocking and strange. The gospel of Christ is so clear and simple that all who will put their minds to the task can learn and obey the plan of salvation. All true Christians have been led by the spirit, through and by the Word, to be baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Colossians 1:18 teaches that the body is the church. When we obey the gospel plan of salvation from the heart, we are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47).

Christ established His church (Matthew 16:18) many years before any denominational church existed. How, then, can one be a member of Christ's church if he has never obeyed the gospel plan of salvation? Or how can one be baptized into the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 12:13) if he believes and desires to be a member of a denominational church? In other words, how can one be added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47) if he plans and believes he is joining a denominational church?

Some will say that the Lord's church is made up of all the denominational churches. How can this possibly be when denominations teach different plans of entrance into "their" churches and practice different doctrines? Is Christ divided? Are the examples of conversions found in the book of Acts wrong? Of course not! God has only **one** plan of salvation and all who wish to enter the Lord's church must obey it.

We Will Reap What We Sow

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7,8). God

has made it perfectly clear that we will reap in eternity that which we have sown in this life.

It is sad when people ignore God's word and stubbornly continue in the way of sin. It is even sadder when those who have obeyed the gospel of Christ go back into the world and engage in the works of the flesh. *"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

We will be blessed if we will sow good deeds and strive to produce the fruit of the spirit. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22,23).

Brethren, we need to be very careful that we do not sow to the flesh. Many works of the flesh carry consequences that last a lifetime, and even though the wrong-doing may be repented of, the effects of the sin remain. On the other hand, if we sow to the Spirit we will reap everlasting life. Yes, we are going to reap what we sow. The choices we make in this life will determine where we spend eternity.

Be Angry and Sin Not

An important message regarding anger is taught in Ephesians 4:26: *"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath...."* Anger, when out of control, can be a very

destructive emotion. Words spoken in anger have caused friendships to be broken, marriages to fail, and even lives to be taken. Many hearts have been broken by words spoken in anger.

All of us need to work at controlling our anger. While this is easier said than done, temper can be brought under control with effort. Christians especially must be careful not to say or do things in anger that will cause others to sin.

We must also work at letting go of anger. Sometimes people will get angry and stay angry for months, even years. Harboring anger will seriously damage our emotional health. We must determine to turn loose of that hurt and anger and get on with our lives. Praying for one who has hurt or angered us will help us get over those feelings. It is very difficult to stay mad at someone we are daily praying for.

In all things we must pattern our lives after the Lord: *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever”* (Psalm 103:8,9).

He further instructs that *“a soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger”* (Proverbs 15:1). As Christians, we must always strive to control our tongues and return a soft answer when we are confronted in anger.

The words of the Lord speak to us in Matthew 5:22: *“But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”* Brethren, let us keep our anger under control. And when we do get angry, we must take steps to get over it so we do not sin.

Anger that is bottled up inside will cause great harm.

Weary in Well Doing

The apostle Paul exhorted: *“But, ye brethren, be not weary in well doing”* (2 Thessalonians 3:13). Most Christians begin their spiritual lives with strong resolve to remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), but as time passes some begin to grow weary. They may even delude themselves into thinking they are living a Christian life.

One thing we can be sure of is that our lives will not remain at one level emotionally — there will be highs and there will be lows. Some Christians find it difficult to remain strong in their commitment to the Lord for an extended period of time. Some will reach a point in their lives when they are only warm in their relationship with the Lord. Others will drop completely out of service and go back into the world, leaving their first love and reverting to their old habits.

Brethren, unless we are faithful in Bible study and prayer, we are in danger of falling away. Regular communication with God is so important! God speaks to us through His Holy Word when we study our Bible. And we speak to God when we approach Him in prayer. If we neglect to be faithful in these two areas, we are in danger of becoming weary and slipping away.

The apostle Peter spoke of those who go back into the world, and he did not paint a pretty picture: *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the begin-*

ning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22). Let us determine that we will not grow weary in well doing!

Teaching and Edification

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul taught, *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors and **teachers**; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the **edifying** of the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11,12). To edify is to improve spiritually or morally by instruction or example. A definition we commonly hear is **“to build up.”** Moral or spiritual improvement will certainly serve to build up.

Teaching is a great work, and Jesus was the greatest of teachers. Just as He came to earth to do the will of His Father, we too must equip ourselves to do God’s will. We must be sure that we are well prepared to teach God’s word. Since we cannot teach what we do not know, we must spend time studying the Bible in order to be prepared to teach. Many of our brethren are very good teachers. They seem to have a talent to present their subject and explain the Bible in such a way that it can easily be understood.

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul admonished his son in the faith: *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the*

same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Teachers have a great influence on their students. Therefore, we need to be sure we are teaching the truth — God’s word. In this way faithful men will grow in the knowledge of God’s will, and will be able to teach and bring others who are lost to Christ.

The author of Hebrews rebuked: *“For when for the time you ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat”* (Hebrews 5:12). While the teacher has a great responsibility, so also does the student. He has the responsibility to continue to learn and grow as a Christian. The student can accomplish this by studying his Bible — learning about God’s will — and spending time in prayer and meditation, and adding the Christian graces to his life. Let’s be students of God’s word.

A Peculiar People

The apostle Peter taught concerning the church: *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **a peculiar people** that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Christians must be different from the world, realizing we have been separated from the world through our obedience to the gospel of Christ. In this passage Peter refers to the church as a holy nation and a peculiar people. One of the ways in which we are “peculiar” is the commitment we have made to be faithful to our Lord unto death.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, admonished: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that acceptable, and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:1,2). When we are truly committed to God, we will give ourselves completely to His service. Our thoughts will be on heavenly things; our purpose in life will be to prepare for eternity.

In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote concerning Christ and the church: *“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself **a peculiar people**, zealous of good works”* (Titus 2:14). Christ gave Himself to die for us that we might have forgiveness of our sins. We, therefore, must be zealous of good works. Serving our Lord with all the zeal we are able to supply will help us to truly be a peculiar people. When Christ is alive in us, we will be like a light set upon a hill and all people will be able to see His influence in our lives. Let's not grow weary in well doing, but let us be “a peculiar people,” always seeking to renew our strength and dedication to God.

The Kingdom of Christ

In his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote, *“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:12-14). Obedience to the

gospel plan of salvation translates us from the power of Satan (or darkness) and into the kingdom of His Son. God has made it possible for us to be saved through obedience: faith (Mark 16:16), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Romans 10:10), baptism (Acts 2:38) and living faithfully (Revelation 2:10). Outside of Christ there is nothing but condemnation; in Christ there is salvation.

Before Pentecost, all references to the kingdom were in the future tense. Then, following Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, we read that the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved (Acts 2:47). We can see that the kingdom was then in existence; thus we know the kingdom was established on the day of Pentecost.

The author of Hebrews admonished, *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28). The Lord used the terms church and kingdom interchangeably in Matthew 16:18,19: *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* The New Testament presents the church and the kingdom as one-and-the-same in detail and characteristic.

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the

beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:6-9).

Responsibility

The apostle Paul warns in Colossians 2:8: *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”* Though these words were written many years ago, we remain in great need of the same warning today. Too many are listening to men and are not searching the scriptures to see if what is being taught is actually so.

Oh, how we need to go back to the Bible and base our belief upon the word of God! There are men who can deceive a vast number of people by smooth talk and twisting the scriptures. While it may be easier to accept what a man says about the Bible instead of examining the scriptures, have you ever received anything without effort that turned out to be worth much? The same principle applies to living the Christian life. We are to dig into the Word and become convinced and committed **because of what the Bible says**, not because of what some man says.

We live in a society of people who do not accept responsibility for their actions. There are many who profess to be Christians, yet have not given much thought or accepted responsibility for what they really are and what they really believe. If

we will study the Bible and rightly divide it, our lifestyles will conform to the word of God. People would no longer be rebellious and afraid that living the Christian life would deprive them. They would realize that what really matters is their relationship with God.

The Bible does not teach error! It does not lead astray, but will reveal the truth if we will take the time to really study it. Let's determine to live responsibly, and strive to be students of the Word.

A Living Sacrifice

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Just as the apostle Paul pleaded with the brethren at Rome to have a great desire and sacrificial love for God, the same is true for us today. Because our bodies house the spirit that dwells within us, we need to keep them clean and free from bad habits.

Not only are we to keep our bodies clean, but we need to use ourselves up serving the Lord. There is so much Christians can do each day to keep ourselves holy, both in body and mind. We are to work for our Savior by spreading the borders of the kingdom of Christ. If we will strive to live in a holy and acceptable manner unto God, then He will bless us with many opportunities. To live in this way for Christ is no more than that which is reasonable.

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that

good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). As Christians, we have put on Christ and have determined to walk in His way, turning away from the ways of the world. Thus, we do away with the old life of sin and we walk in the light of God’s Word. We must be guided by a mind that has been renewed. The will of God is perfect, and we who are God’s children must be committed to doing His will. God’s Holy Word reveals to us everything we need to live godly lives, and our determination to do God’s will must be strong.

Though the world constantly pulls at us to do wrong, the Bible tells us that we will not be tempted above that which we are able to stand, and that with the temptation we will be provided a way of escape (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13). By concentrating on adding the Christian graces to our lives and by striving to do His will, we will grow and become what God would have us to be.

A Good Example

In the 37th chapter of Genesis we read about Jacob. We see that Jacob loved his son Joseph more than his other children because Joseph was born of his old age, and he made Joseph a coat of many colors. His brothers hated Joseph because of the special treatment their father showed to him, and when Joseph reported two dreams to them, in which they and their parents were bowing down to him, they hated him even more than they had previously.

One day when his brothers were tending sheep some fifty miles away, Jacob sent Joseph to see about their welfare. He wore the special coat his father had given him when he went to

check on them, and when he arrived at the camp, his brothers stripped him of his coat and cast him into a pit. Later some traders passed by on their way to Egypt and the brothers sold Joseph to them. Then the brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's coat in it and returned to their father. In this way they deceived Jacob into believing that his son had been killed by a wild beast. Joseph was only seventeen years old when his father sent him on this long journey to see about his brothers. This points out the fact that Joseph accepted responsibility at a very early age.

In chapter 39 we find that upon his arrival in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, who was captain of the guard. Joseph was again given much responsibility because Potiphar could see that God was with Joseph. Things went well until Potiphar's wife asked Joseph to lie with her. Joseph refused, asking "*...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" When she again pursued him, he fled from her. She then lied to her husband about the incident, accusing Joseph of making advances toward her. Upon hearing his wife's accusation, Potiphar became so angry with Joseph that he put him in prison. But because of Joseph's character, God continued to bless him.

Young people, we all need to be more like Joseph. We should follow the example he set for us and handle temptation in the same way he did. Too often we look to sports figures as role models, and many of these men and women have poor moral character. We need to carefully choose our role models, and let those who are dedicated to God be the ones we admire.

Seven Attributes of a Successful Soul Winner

1) He is assured of his own salvation: *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"* (1 John 5:13). Many don't have this assurance, possibly because they have not yet completely surrendered their own lives to God.

2) He lives a clean life: *"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use. . ."* (2 Timothy 2:21). We live in a world wherein we constantly face temptations; we must flee from all appearance of evil.

3) He leads a surrendered life: *"For me to live is Christ. . ."* (Philippians 1:21). The apostle Paul told the brethren in Acts 20:31 that he *" . . . ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."*

4) He has love: *"We love him, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). We must have a love for lost souls, and must work diligently to bring them to Christ.

5) He perseveres. Satan will discourage us; we must develop patience to follow through.

6) He possesses a good practical knowledge of the Bible: *"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of*

God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. . .” (2 Timothy 3:15,16).

7) He has a good prayer life: *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . .” (Matthew 7:7). “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37,38).*

Let us all strive to develop these qualities, that we may be diligent in the Lord’s work.

Choose This Day

It is sad that so many in the church have children who fail to be faithful. Is it because we are failing to teach the importance of commitment and faithfulness? In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 we read:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates.” And again in Joshua 24:15: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the

Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

If the Lord is the first priority in our lives we will keep His word ever before us and our children. We will be sure that we are faithful to the Lord by being present at every service of the church. We will make sure that the word of God is held in high regard and that great respect for God is evident in our lives. We need to choose whom we will serve — will it be materialism or the God of heaven? When we put our hand to the plow we don't need to be looking back.

Let's Be Content

The apostle Paul offers encouragement in the Philippian letter: *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11); and in the 13th verse: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* Unfortunately, many today are so dissatisfied with life that unhappiness is evident in almost everything they do. We all need to learn, as Paul did, to be happy and to find peace and contentment in our lives. Happiness is not found in the accumulation of material goods, but in truly making God the Lord of our lives, bringing ourselves in subjection to Him by doing His will.

In order to change our attitudes, we must first believe we can change. Peace will then find its place in our lives as we draw near to the Lord. A good example of this peace is described in Habakkuk 3:17,18: *"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail,*

and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Habakkuk had learned that the most important thing in life is having the right relationship with God.

Christians can find great strength and peace in the Lord despite much personal suffering. True joy is to know that even our crosses in life can be used by God for His glory and our good. It is difficult for us to see the overall picture, but we can trust and thank Him even when we are in pain. We need to remember that the Lord doesn't bring about the pain, but is always there helping us to bear it, even unto death. He reaches out for us and never pulls away. For the faithful Christian He has promised eternal life in heaven where there will be joy forever. John spoke of the mansion prepared for the faithful (John 14:1-3). The very thought of such a place should bring peace and joy to the hearts of all believers.

Looking Back

Those of us who are considered “older Christians” are blessed by having lived in the days when gospel meetings were a very effective means of winning lost souls for Christ. It wasn't unusual during the 'fifties and early 'sixties to see large numbers of people responding to the gospel invitation, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty baptisms during a gospel meeting.

Large crowds would be present. It wasn't uncommon for the seats in the auditorium to be filled and for chairs to be set up in the aisles, and even then there may have been people standing

around the walls. Children would often sit around the podium.

Some of the preachers of that time used visual aids printed on large sheets or some other material. The preacher would take a pointer and go over each scripture very carefully, making sure the audience understood the message.

Usually, in country church buildings, fans were used to try to keep the audience cool, but even with the best of efforts it was often very hot and uncomfortable. The seats were normally hard, as they had no cushioning. And the sermons were often long.

The audience, however, came back night after night to listen to God's Word being proclaimed. There was a genuine appreciation for the Word of God, and people took advantage of the opportunities they had to learn as much as they could.

Those of us who are older and who were privileged to attend those gospel meetings look back with fondness, remembering with joy the great harvest of souls!

Children, Obey Your Parents

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Let us focus for a moment on the admonition to fathers in verse four. Men, God has entrusted us with a tremendous responsibility as leaders in our homes, a responsibility we should never

take lightly. We must strive to instill a loving, Christ-like spirit in our children, both by our example and by our teaching. We should refrain from teasing our children, for excessive teasing creates a fighting spirit in a child. Many immature fathers encourage their children, especially their sons, to fight and “stand up for themselves.” They may even laugh when their children use profanity. Some parents push their children into sports, perhaps wanting them to excel in an area where the parents themselves had been unsuccessful. And how many times have you heard a parent tell his child that he is mean? A child who hears such a statement often enough will soon begin to believe it.

Let us always be mindful of the treasure God has blessed us with in our children. Though He did not give us a how-to-raise-children manual that deals with every personality and every situation, He did provide a great pattern book. He tells us to love our children, and to set the right example for them by showing our love for one another. We are to treat our children with respect, and teach them by word and example to treat others respectfully. Above all, our children must see in our lives a true love for the Father, and must see that we live before Him a humble, obedient life.

May God bless you with a family that will always be a joy to you, and may you all know heaven as your eternal home.

Leaving Your First Love

When one hears the gospel of Christ and obeys from the heart the plan of salvation (Acts 2:38) God adds that saved one to the church (Acts 2:47). Of course, each new Christian comes to

Christ intending to remain faithful (Revelation 2:10), and most will grow stronger in their faith, but there are some, sadly, who will drift away and go back into the world. They turn away from God as the Lord of their lives and get caught up in the world, often being lured by Satan's enticements of material goods and physical pleasures. They gradually lose control of their lives and are carried along at such a fast pace that they need help to come back to the Lord.

We all need the peace, safety and hope that comes from being faithful to our Lord. And each of us has a responsibility to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ to remain faithful: *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:12,13).

Evidence of weakness in cleaving to the Lord is often manifest by unfaithfulness in attendance. The Hebrew writer encourages us: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25). And in verse 26: *"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."*

Many will stray and will need help in finding their way back to a good relationship with God. We are commanded to restore these erring Christians: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). May we always endeavor to reach out to these brethren.

Where Do We Place Our Priorities

Heaven is described in the Bible as a wonderful place where the saved will spend eternity. Jesus, in speaking of the judgment scene, states that the wicked will go into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life eternal (Matthew 25:46). John also told of heaven in Revelation 21:4: *“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”*

Heaven is far more desirable than any material possession here on earth. The desire for a home in heaven should make us think about our priorities and about how much value we place on our soul and the souls of others. Consider the rich young man who would not sell all he owned and give to the poor. Instead he chose his material possessions above eternal life (Matthew 19:16-26).

We must stop and examine our lives. How much time do we spend in pursuit of material things in comparison to the amount of time we spend in worship and service to the Lord: How about time spent trying to bring others to Christ? We must place more importance on the value of our own soul as well as the souls of others.

We are living in a time and in a nation when almost everyone believes that they should have everything they want. With many it doesn't make much difference how they get it — they just feel it is their right to have whatever they want. This attitude is the

source of much of the gambling that is taking place today. Many want to get rich quick, therefore they gamble with the expectation of becoming rich. Gambling is wrong; it is addictive and takes money that should be used to provide the necessities of life. The desire to “strike it rich” drives people to take money from the family income to gamble.

Christians should not engage in any type of gambling. Let us make heaven our priority and strive to lay up our treasures there.

Balance

Man has always had difficulty remaining faithful to God for a long period of time. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit; Cain was rebellious and offered the wrong sacrifice to God; Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire; Ananias and Sapphira tried to lie to God. Many Christians in the early church turned from the truth and digressed from the pure word of God. We could mention many other examples of man departing from God’s way but these should suffice for now.

A cry for change is being heard throughout the brotherhood. Some are saying the church is not completely restored and changes need to be made; some have said we need a new method of interpreting the scriptures and applying them. These same brethren would move the church to the left. Then there are those on the right who are pulling the church in a very negative way toward lethargy and would put out all the fire and zeal we have in living for Christ.

Why can’t we be happy with taking a balanced approach to living the Christian life? Why are many trying to fix the church

when it is not broken? As children of God, we make up the New Testament church. Let's devote ourselves to living as close to God as we can and to bringing lost souls to Christ before it is too late. As Christians we need to look to the scriptures for guidance and help and we need to love God with all our heart, soul, and might, and love the church for which Christ died.

“For God So Loved the World...”

We are told in His word that God loves the souls of all men: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). God's love is an unconditional love; He loves all souls. But even though He loves all souls, all souls will not be saved. God has given His will to everyone in the pages of the New Testament. Man must be obedient to the gospel of Christ in order to be saved.

God has clearly outlined His plan and will for mankind: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17); *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16); *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30); *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Romans 10:10); *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall*

receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38); and “*...be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life*” (Revelation 2:10b). God has given this plan of salvation so that man can understand how to be saved. It is up to us to make the choice: We can either come to Him and be saved, or ignore His plan and be lost. The Bible is our road map to heaven — we must study it carefully and be sure we obey what God has commanded. If we try to come to God any other way, He will reject us just as He rejected Cain when he tried to worship Him by doing things his way rather than God’s way.

The Lord holds out His way to all men, and it is man’s responsibility to obey Him. We must put aside all rebellion and humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, being willing to allow Him His rightful place as Lord and master of our lives. Jesus said in John 14:15, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*”

Roll Up Your Sleeves and Get Going!

Why is it so difficult to get Christians involved in the Lord’s service? Many spend a lot of time studying all kinds of methods of service and attending workshops on how to do the job, but never get past the learning stage. They just never seem to be able to get started.

There are preachers in the brotherhood who talk long and hard about the work that needs to be done, but never step out and become involved in what they are promoting. It is much easier

to “talk the talk” than it is to “walk the walk.” To provide leadership in service requires much more than wearing a title. It means commitment; it means “roll up your sleeves and get going!”

Look at evangelism in today’s world. Never has so much material been available on how to be effective in this area of work as there is today. Yet, never have I known such difficulty in getting members of the church involved in winning lost souls for the Lord. The harvest truly is white, but the real laborers are few. We miss opportunities everyday to teach the gospel of Christ. When are we going to put the knowledge and talents we have to use in spreading the borders of the kingdom?

Brethren, let’s not be guilty of asking others to do what we will not do ourselves. Let us strive to be good examples to our brothers and sisters and to the world around us. We can do this by diligently using the ability and knowledge we have. Let us be steadfast in our commitment to Christ, being always watchful and ready for the Lord’s return when He will take the faithful to heaven with Him.



About the Author

Dale Grissom

has served as
Personal Work
Evangelist at the
Dexter, MO
Church of Christ
for the past 18
years, and for 16 of
those years he has
also served as an

elder. He has written numerous articles which have appeared in many church bulletins as well as in *The Voice of Truth International*, *World Evangelist*, and *The Fourstate Gospel News*.

At age 72, brother Grissom still teaches two Bible classes every week and occasionally accepts speaking engagements in addition to maintaining a full-time personal work ministry. Married for 53 years to the former Eulah Richey, Dale Grissom is the father of five, grandfather of nine, and great-grandfather of one.